

THE SONG AND THE SINGER



FREDERICK
R. BURTON

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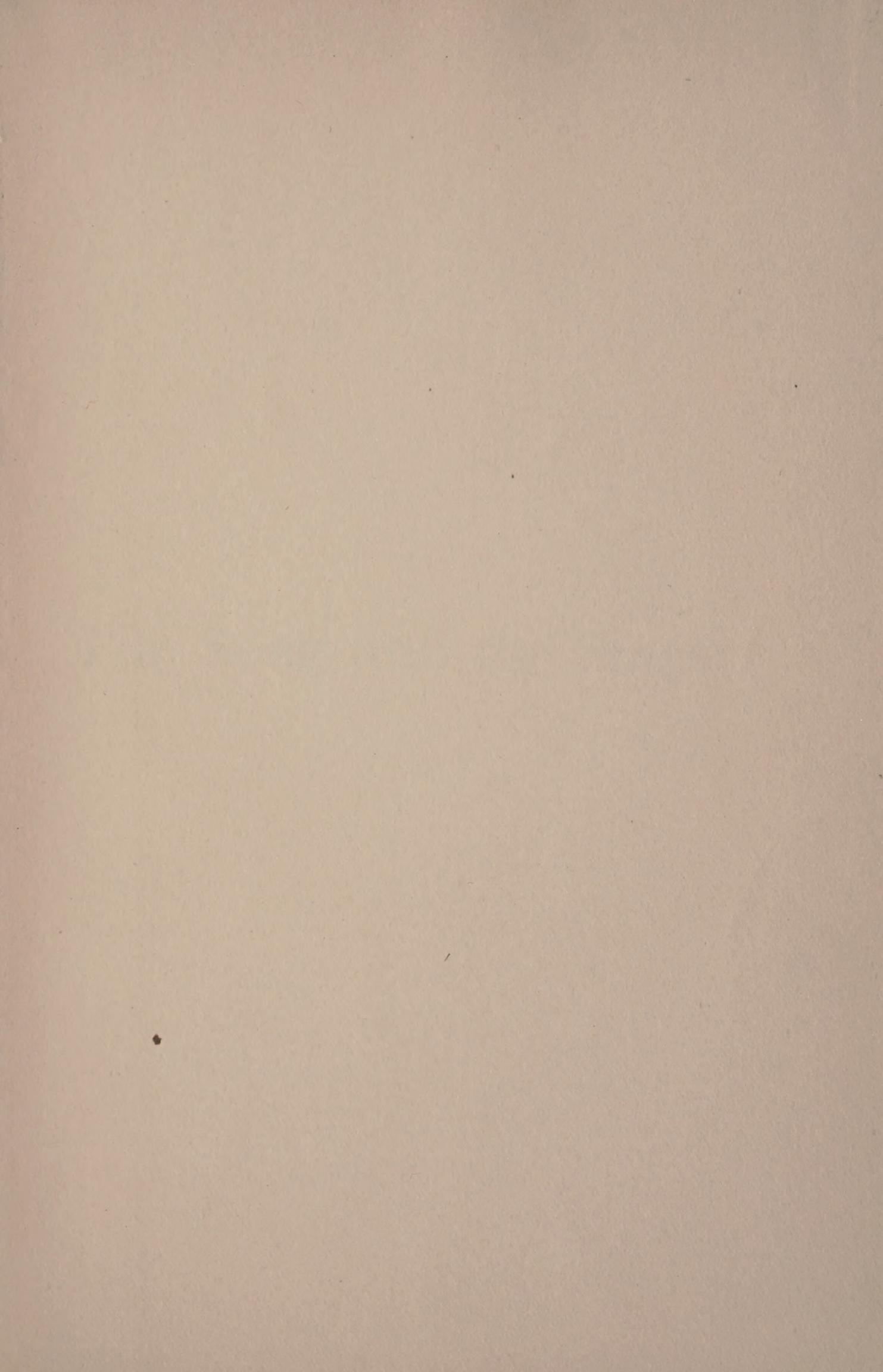
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The Song and the Singer

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He had not turned a page before he well nigh lost his fingers in astonishment and delight.

See page 100.

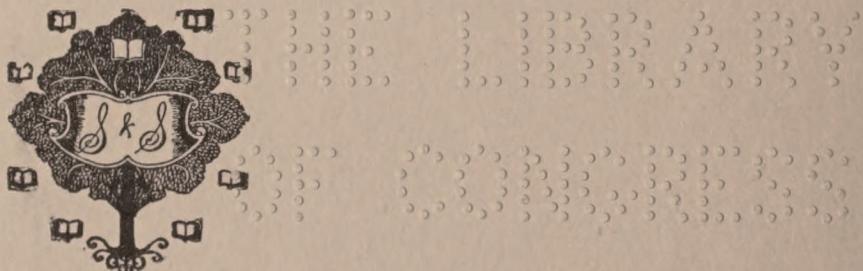
The Song and the Singer

A Setting Forth, in Words, of Certain Movements in a
Latter-day Life: Prelude—Allegro; Andante con
moto; Scherzo; Presto con brio—Coda.

BY

FREDERICK R. BURTON

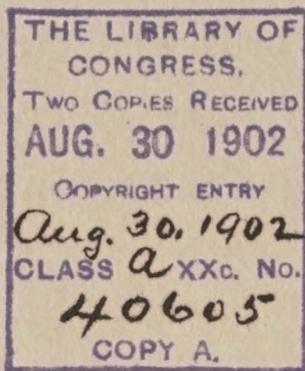
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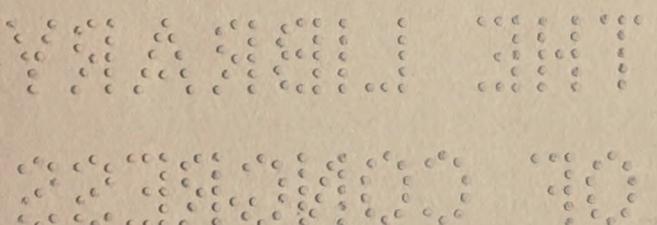
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THE SONG AND THE SINGER.



To her who knows the meaning of appreciation
and gives it most bountifully,

MY MOTHER.

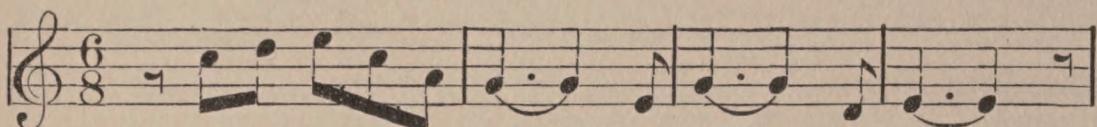
THERE is a world that some of us know. It is not material, it is not spiritual, as we commonly understand that word ; but the one is essential to it, and it breathes the lofty atmosphere of the other. Its inhabitants do not realize that it is. To the appreciation of its wonders, its beauties, its exaltations, there needs the gift of divine ignorance. Who has that may enter this world as a discoverer. That which we who live here know about it, and which is to us as the names of our streets and the gross things on our tables, appears to him as marvels never seen of man. Before him are mountains that lose their crests in the empyrean ; before him stretch vistas that surpass the feeble imaginations of the poets. He sees and knows this world as can no other, and could, if he would, properly scorn the dwellers therein. For this world, in brief, is the world of Music.

FROM THE DIARY OF A HERMIT OF THE FLATS.

THE SONG AND THE SINGER.

PRELUDE.

I.



"Faust," Act III.—Gounod.

"All the words 'n music of the opry! Fifteen cents!
Cost ya quarter inside! Book, mister?"

Ordway recoiled a bit before the insistence of the seedy individual who stood in his way and flaunted a libretto before his eyes. He wanted one, but he could do without it. So he assumed not to see or hear this tradesman of the streets, and pushed on.

"Cost ya quarter inside," repeated the dealer, falling in beside Ordway, and still holding the flimsy pamphlet where the cheap gilt cover design with the magnetic word "Faust" could not but be seen.

"No!" said Ordway, groutily.

The man instantly wheeled about and offered his stock to another.

"How does he know that I am going to the opera?" mused Ordway. "And what makes him infer so confidently that the saving of ten cents is material to me?"

Annoying question to a sensitive nature. There was once a man who so shrank from the acknowledgment

of impecuniosity that, under the stinging influence of a libretto dealer's economical argument, he bought a parquette seat for two dollars and a half, and a twenty-five-cent libretto from the boy in the aisle, when it had been his intention to take standing room for a dollar; and, if he had been pinned down to it, he would have had to confess that he could not afford as much as standing room.

The second query rankled little with Ordway. It was framed in his thoughts because the impulse operated swiftly, but it was as swiftly lost in the significant phrase of the first query—"Going to the opera." It was hardly credible. There was a sensation in his breast that made him catch his breath and repeat dogmatically: "It is so! It is so!" Yes, he was going to the opera, and that this more than pleasure should be his was cause for wonder. It was not impossible, for here was he at the very entrance to the imposing building; here was he—Herbert Ordway—actually elbowing his way in, one of the throng to which the event was agreeably commonplace. With what elation did he take his position at the end of the line reaching to the box office! With what ingenuous pride, wholly untainted by envy, did he observe the onward procession of gorgeous cloaks that gave fleeting and enchanting glimpses of the gowns beneath, a yards-long wreath of fur now and again slipping to muffled shoulders and thus displaying a handsome face! There was the flash of jewels, too, from bared heads; and there was the embodiment of the

crushing force that makes possible the wearing of jewels in the square-shouldered men who strode under high hats and behind shields of diamond-studded white, beside the women. It was all well, and as it should be; and he, for the moment, was a part of it.

Slowly the space between him and the ticket window decreased. At last he could see the passing in of money and the output of red and green slips. One man protested at the place assigned him, and there was delay while the imperturbable man inside effected an exchange. The man behind Ordway grumbled. To Ordway, eager though he was to be within the walls of this abode of wonders, all this was but part and parcel of the experience. He smiled, not because he enjoyed the delay as such, but because it came to him under such exhilarating circumstances.

At last there was but one ahead. Ordway heard the conversation.

"Nothing for two dollars!" said the functionary within.

"What! All sold?" queried the patron.

"Orchestra chairs only."

"Well——" and the patron grudgingly handed in another dollar.

It was Ordway's turn.

"One for a dollar, please," said he.

"Gallery entrance around the corner," was the icily serene response from behind the window, and the ticket seller's eyes turned inquiringly to the man next in line.

Truly, to the box-office magnate all men are the same. It matters not to him that one patron would have a place for a dollar, and another for two. He is there to dispense exact justice at so much per, and he will pass out a slip entitling you to a chair behind a pillar without one throb of emotion.

Nevertheless, Ordway blushed. It was not that he was going to the gallery, or that the place was so named. He had figured on that in his weeks of anticipation ; but there was a sense of maladroitness, a consciousness of rusticity, that made him lower his eyes as he faced the incoming procession of the richly garbed, and hurried from the main entrance. The same seedy book dealer who had accosted him before seized upon him again. Ordway bought a libretto this time, perhaps as a sop to a vague sense of disappointment, and fled around the corner.

There was no long line of purchasers before the gallery ticket window. Three or four stragglers ahead slapped their dollars on the ledge and fairly ran with their oft-thumbed pasteboards to the beginning and up the first of the many flights of stairs.

It seemed to Ordway that never should he arrive at the top. As it was apparently the fashion to hurry along this avenue to the heights, he also ran. Three steps at a time hardly sufficed him for the first flight, but two served for the second ; and when at length he came to a morose-looking man who sat beside a gaping tin box, and who dropped his ticket into it, Ordway

was breathing hard. There were yet other winding stairs to climb. He was content now to put a foot on each step, and he was still panting when at last he saw the great chandelier, dimly lit, the curving rows of seats, the distant top of the proscenium arch, and when for the first time he smelt the atmosphere, rich with escaped gas, that is most delicious near the roof of a theatre. He filled his lungs with it, as he had to, there being no less tainted air at command, and liked it. Without fully realizing it, he yet perceived that this, too, was as it should be; the very atmosphere of art was different from that of the commercial, libretto-selling world he had left behind and some unmeasured distance below. For a long time after that memorable evening his heart never failed to respond with a thrill of deep content when his nostrils recognized the characteristic odor; and if he were to go to the gallery to-night, such is his retention of impressionable buoyancy, his heart would thrill much as it did then—not so exultantly, doubtless, but in the same way.

Ordway had snatched a programme from a pile on the way up, and now he sought for a seat. Every place in all the rows toward the front was taken. Far over on the other side were vacant places where the listener bade fair to bump his head against the roof if he stood up. He considered, and declined the opportunity they offered; some portion of the stage would likely be concealed from such a viewpoint. So he clambered into an extension of the gallery that rose up, and up, and back

so far that the end of it seemed to be over the street, and there, on the very back row, he found a place. From it, as he sat down, he saw a conical hood on the front of the stage, and wondered what it was.

As time went on, for it was yet early, a few more straggled into the gallery. Ordway studied his programme. Had he been in a front row he might have been more occupied in observing the yawning vastness of the place, and he might have found entertainment in the gradual filling of orchestra chairs far beneath, and the more gradual filling of the box tiers a little nearer. As it was, he could not see a single box, and for a time the programme was his only relief.

There was, first, the sprawling announcement on the cover page to be read, and then, after a hasty glance at several pages devoted to the glorification of certain pianofortes, bonbons and dentists—what is the bond between the opera and dentistry that brings to the performance of one the unaesthetic announcement of the other?—he found the cast. This interested him deeply. There were names that, by dint of faithful reading of one musical periodical and the musical department of one Sunday paper, had become to him as household words. Was it actually possible that he was about to see and hear these great personages?

It seemed as if he had been transported to an unreal land, or translated to a bygone age; for, though the years were few since first he had learned these names, they had been long years to him, and the persons thus

identified were like heroes from the misty past. That they were living, contemporaneous creatures had hardly occurred to him. There were Signor Thisini and Signor Thatolo, as Faust and Mephisto, respectively; and Herr Somebodyski, as Valentin; Mlle. de Whichere, as Margaret—Margarita, according to the programme; Marguerite, according to the libretto; Madame Whatin, as Martha, and, oddly conspicuous among the foreign names, Miss Julia Ward, as Siebel. He had not heard of her. Young as he was, he could not but feel a special interest in this one person who, of all the cast at an American opera house, had a name that suggested her as a compatriot. He felt proud that one of his country-women had risen so high.

Eventually, when the lights in the big chandelier were turned on to their fullest, so that the really fashionable folk then pouring in might be seen of men and women, Ordway took one long, comprehensive look at the hundreds in the great gallery, and wondered if all there were as happy as he was. For an instant he was conscious of apprehension lest calamity—a fire, for example—should arise to snatch the cup from him ere it touched the lips. Then he dismissed the sensation as childish, and next moment his elbows were on his knees, his head bowed, his attention concentrated, for he heard the sombre tones of the violoncello mourning in the unseen depths of the hollow beyond the front row.

In all the realm of music there is little that suggests

the charm of mysticism so well as the first few measures in the introduction to "Faust." Ordway felt it, and when the curtain rose he was prepared. There was the unkempt scholar, with his one absurd desk and his one solitary volume, and the same shabby pretence of a scene that you and I have long since chosen to accept without even mental protest as an incorrigible evil in the production of this opera. The shabbiness, the incompleteness of the picture, did not disturb him. The message of the poet was more than absorbing to him as it was voiced by the composer. The warbling gentleman behind the grey beard was Faust, and the plaints he uttered were those of the universal human soul.

Then, presently, came Mephistopheles. Happy observer on the topmost back row, that on this occasion the distinguished barytone consented to effect his entrance by way of a trap! A lurid glow at one side of the stage, and, presto! the devil, with his sonorous: "Sono qui!"

How much more impressive than a conventional entrance from the wings, or through a spring door in the drop! Ordway thinks so. Not since he arrived at the point where he could make comparisons has he ceased to long for the appearance of Satan from regions beneath the surface.

It was not that he was unduly impressed by the theatrical device, not that he suffered the slightest illusion. He observed the scene from the viewpoint of the creator thereof; he accepted the devices of the stage as

so many symbols of the profound inner drama that wrought its way straight to his soul through the music.

And thus it continued to the end.

Between acts he read the libretto and pondered, and silently sung the fragments of tunes that posed in his fifteen-cent book as "all the music of the opry," and pondered again. He did not realize that the waits were long, though it is safe to say that none among the thousands there assembled was more eager than he for the resumption of the performance.

Not once did he stir from his lofty place. He stood up when the principals trailed, hand in hand, several successive times across the stage to the plaudits and shouts of the crowd, and he exulted at the marks of approval bestowed upon Siebel's flower song. In fact, that morceau made a more distinct impression upon him, musically considered, than did any other single feature of the presentation. That, doubtless, was because of his preconceived interest in Miss Julia Ward as a straightforward American. The charm of the story was broken by her entrance. That is, he could dissociate his absorption in the drama from his curiosity about her personally. But this was for a moment only. Another, and she was to him the graceful embodiment of a boy's innocent and hopeless love.

Ordway was not in a critical frame of mind. All was to him as it should be, for he had never seen or heard anything like it. The one great work he had heard previous to "Faust" was "The Messiah," and that

deeply-stirring oratorio is hardly suited to be the criterion of opera. Yet, when the curtain descended for the last time, and the revived Margarita, the erstwhile hell-bent Faust, and the debonnaire Mephisto had made their last bows, hand in hand and smiling, he marveled that an opera should be so short. It had occurred to him that an operatic representation should be at least half as long as that of an oratorio.

When he glanced at a clock on a neighboring tower, as he issued from the building, his amazement knew no bounds. It was almost midnight.

The spell was heavy upon him as he walked to his lodging. Some fleeting strains haunted him in turn, the easily remembered flower song rising above the recent memories of the exalted trio in the prison; but it was not as so many details that he recalled the performance. Its weight as a dramatic, harmonious, artistic whole was upon him. He was profoundly melancholy.

II.

There is no friend like the old friend.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes.

From force of habit Ordway awoke early. There had been dreams of heavenly choirs and diabolical orchestras; he had been alternately on the stage and off it; and once he had swung the baton while a beautiful girl in blue tights sang of love and flowers.

The awakening from these confusions was wholly agreeable. He laughed as he reviewed such hazy fragments as clung to his memory, and his heart swelled with renewed delight as he went clearly over the opera he had actually heard. Was there anything in the world that could equal it? Certainly, emphatically, not! What could the smart writers mean who spoke disparagingly of Gounod? Had they forgotten "Faust"?

Ordway wrought himself into something akin to rage while he was dressing and thinking over the detractions of the Frenchman's genius that had come his way. He would like to answer such fellows as they deserved.

The melancholy of midnight had fled before splendid exaltation and a wholesome physical appetite. He ate the heartiest kind of a breakfast and went forth to see the town.

It was not wholly unfamiliar to him. He knew the way, and he presented himself early at the ticket office of a hall where a famous pianist was to give a recital in the evening. Not again would he take the risk of finding all the desirable places in the gallery pre-empted by early comers. At that, his diligence was rewarded by nothing better than a place nearly as close to the roof as he had been the evening before; but that place was secured, and he was content. He journeyed downtown, walked across the great bridge and back, and about noon shot skyward in an elevator to the editorial rooms of a newspaper.

"Well?" said the uncommonly severe youth whose duty it was to meet visitors at the gate and give them hints of the perils of direct contact with journalism.

Ordway was properly impressed, and inquired in the most subdued way if he could see Mr. Jameson.

"Ain't in yet," snapped the boy, and slouched to the row of pastepots that, much to the impairment of his sense of dignity, he had been required to fill in the absence of a colleague.

The caller would have liked to ask permission to wait, but he forbore to intrude unnecessarily on so important a personage as this prematurely soured Janus. He waited without consent, and looked with no small degree of awe upon a spectacled man in the far corner who was cutting pieces out of a newspaper. He was interested, too, in a younger man who sat with his feet on a desk, reading, and in a portly, solemn-looking gentle-

man in shirt-sleeves, who was writing, and who kept tab of his pen by barking a loud "Ahem!" every time he dipped it in ink. Ordway wondered if he were the editor-in-chief.

Save for the periodical "Ahem!" and the shuffling feet of Janus, the room was very still until a brisk young fellow entered, slammed the gate behind him, went to a desk, raised the cover and began to throw things around inside it. Nobody paid any attention to him, though the portly gentleman said "Ahem!" when the time came. Presently the brisk young fellow shut the desk, wrinkled his brows at it, and lifted a book or two and some papers that were lying there.

"Damn!" said he.

"Amen!" said the man who was reading, without looking up.

"Jimmy!" called the brisk fellow, and Janus looked up from his pastepots. "Where the devil are my scissors?"

"Oh!" responded Jimmy, and, with astonishing alacrity, he caught up the implement needed and ran with it to the inquirer.

"You're an infernal nuisance, Jimmy!" remarked the young man, feelingly. "I've told you time and again to let my scissors alone. Sponge on somebody else; d'ye hear?"

Janus Jimmy evidently heard, for he looked doubly sour as he shuffled back to his distasteful employment. Ordway exulted at the severe young person's discomfiture.

"Ahem!" barked the portly gentleman, and all was still again.

A moment later Ordway heard a voice that he knew at the door behind him. He turned and grasped the hand of the most surprised reporter in the city.

"Bert!" he cried. "Bert, by all that's good, and true, and beautiful! How are you? Glad to see you, old fellow. Wait a second, will you? I've got to tell the old man something about a story I was on last night. Then we'll have breakfast. Here, Jimmy, get a chair for this gentleman."

"Certainly, Mr. Jameson," responded Janus, as the reporter strode past him.

It came over Ordway, then, that Janus had no enviable position in the world's affairs. Subject to the orders of many, without recourse from tyranny and abuse, what wonder that he should vent his repressed resentment upon shy visitors from the country? So, when Jimmy passed a chair over the rail, "Thank you, sir," said Ordway, kindly.

"Keep the change," said Janus.

Ordway smiled and watched the reporter stalk up to the desk of the spectacled man and make his report. He of the spectacles nodded two or three times, and the reporter departed abruptly.

"Come on," said he, as he issued from the gate, and took Ordway by the arm.

"Ahem!" said the portly man.

The reporter made no further remarks until he had

ushered his friend into the elevator car. Then he squared off and looked him over.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, admiringly; "what a peach it is! How are things in East Wilton, Bert? Same old weather-beaten benches on the common? Is old Daddy Witherspoon still asleep with his feet on the rail of the hotel porch? And how are the Muses, and all the little Muses, eh?"

"See here, Billy," cried Ordway, grasping his friend by the shoulders and shaking him with affectionate violence, "this is no way to conduct a conversation. You answer your questions by the very asking——"

"Except about the Muses."

"The Muses are doing very well, thank you. Tell me about those fellows in the office. What is the capacity of the gentleman in his shirt-sleeves?"

"Fatty Miller? Oh, I should say about a gallon a day."

"I mean what does he do for the paper."

"No! Did you mean that, Bert?" and the reporter affected surprise. "Same old Bert," he added, with mock gravity—"just the same old, serious, prematurely aged Bert!"

"Answer the question, Billy."

"Fatty Miller is the crop reporter, a man after your own heart, Bert. It is his distinguished privilege in journalism to inform an anxious public about the state of the weather in Kansas, and its probable effect on corn; likewise the price current of potatoes. At this

impressive moment he is probably engaged upon an account of the most recent importation of Bermuda onions."

They had been schoolmates, Bert Ordway and Will Jameson, and the most intimate of companions until the time, three or four years agone, when Will broke from the restraints of a country village and ventured forth to conquer the city. Since then they had met but once, and the correspondence bravely, aye, ardently, begun had dwindled to naught, owing on the one side to Ordway's increasing consciousness that there was nothing in East Wilton life that could interest Will, and on the other to the inability or unwillingness of a writer to write.

Jameson was somewhat the elder, but that fact affected their intimacy not at all, for Ordway had been gifted with bookish precocity which brought it about that his associations were ever with boys who were his seniors. They thought of and referred to each other—these sprigs in their twenties—as "old" friends, and each stoutly believed that the other could be counted a firm ally in any emergency. Let it not be doubted that both were right.

The walk was so crowded it was not the easiest thing for them to keep side by side after they left the newspaper building. but the crush was no damper upon the reporter's volubility. He kept up a brisk descriptive commentary on the men in the office, turning quite around at times to enable his companion to hear, until,

still talking, he opened a door and entered a place that had the somewhat deceptive word "Cafe" inscribed on the windows.

"It's one of the evils of the system," he was saying. "You get your orders from the day city editor and make your report to the night city editor. Meantime things may happen to make your orders look like thirty cents, and the night city editor may have ideas of his own. What will you have?"

He came to this self-interruption with one elbow negligently against the bar.

"Nothing," said Ordway. "I'm not thirsty."

"Unhappy being!" sighed the reporter. "I've got a thirst on this morning that I wouldn't exchange for a column story. Been nursing it all the way downtown and looking forward to this glorious moment. Manhattan cocktail, John."

This latter was to the urbane bartender, who bowed and looked inquiringly at Ordway. There was one brief, fleeting instant when Jameson looked and acted as nearly embarrassed as it was possible for him to be. Then he added, easily: "Thirst loves company, Bert. Have a glass of seltzer, warranted innocuous."

Ordway took the seltzer and tried to swallow with it his rustic sense of discomfort at his friend's conduct. Shortly afterward they were in a restaurant discussing what was breakfast to one and luncheon to the other.

"You've made me do all the talking thus far," said Jameson. "Tell me about yourself."

"Willingly," replied Ordway; "it's so easy! I've come to the city for a week of music."

"So?"

"I heard 'Faust' last night."

"Bully for you! And where away to-night?"

Ordway told him.

"That's right," and Jameson nodded vigorously. "To-morrow night opera again, I suppose; and Thursday night?"

"There's an embarrassing choice of recitals."

"That must be a grateful novelty for you. I suppose the musical life of East Wilton still finds its highest and only expression in the psalms" (Billy pronounced it "sams") "at the First Church, with its wheezy old organ——"

He stopped abruptly. Ordway had consciously tried to hold his face immovable, and, of course, he had failed.

"I beg your pardon, old fellow," said Jameson. "I suppose you still play the organ there and lead the choir?"

"Yes; but don't think I'm idiot enough to be sensitive of any fun you can get out of it."

"No one said you were sensitive, Bert. Perish the thought! What else do you do in a musical way? You can't give your whole time to it, I suppose?"

"No; the field isn't big enough for that. I'm still keeping the books in the shoe factory. Evenings I look

after a few pupils in piano and voice. I practice a great deal."

"And compose still?"

"I couldn't help that," said Ordway, simply. "I write anthems for the choir, and I've got the singers so well trained that they read from manuscript only a little worse than they do from print."

"They sing your music, do they?"

"Pretty often—more often than is compatible with good taste, I fear; but when a fellow has written something, you know, it's pretty hard to keep it back."

"Yes," laughed the reporter, "you need a city editor. But, seriously, Bert, I have more respect for the musical atmosphere of East Wilton after hearing that. There's hope for it. Tell me what you get out of it."

"In a money way?"

"Sure! What other way is— Oh! your artistic soul leaps to the reply that the best reward is the doing, eh?"

"I'm inclined to think so. I do long for performance, for appreciation. I can't help that any more than I can help writing; and I must say that the ducks and drakes my choir makes of my anthems at times is not wholly calculated to encourage desire for performance."

Ordway laughed gently, as if stirred by comical reminiscences.

"Well, but what's the money return?"

"I get a dollar a Sunday for playing in church, and my pupils pay fifty cents a lesson."

"Do you mean it?" demanded Jameson, with sudden sharpness of tone.

"Yes; why shouldn't I? What's the matter?"

The rustic musician smiled tranquilly, but he forbore to ask the newspaper man more particularly just then, for Billy was swearing softly all to himself, and it seemed a pity to disturb him. When he had soothed himself sufficiently, he made reply in his own peculiar way.

"It's a damned outrage—that's what it is!" he said.

"I don't know," responded Ordway, still smiling. "I have managed to provide for myself and mother, and I have pinched sufficiently to give myself this week's glorious vacation."

"Relatively speaking, that's better than I've done," said Billy; "but it makes my blood boil to think of it, just the same. You ought to be in New York."

Ordway's face flushed and his eyelids quivered.

"Pooh, Billy!" said he. "What could a man like me do in New York? What place is there—"

"A man like you!" echoed Billy. "Why, you could own the town in time. This is where the money is, Bert. Now, you're a genius—"

"Rubbish!" interrupted Ordway; but there was a pleased glow in his eyes. He added: "I understand that every man you meet on the streets is a finished pianist."

"Yes; and you can't swing a stick without hitting a composer; but that's all the more reason why a man

with real talent—— See here, Bert, you can't possibly dream how much is accomplished in this blessed burg by assurance, impudence, gall—anything you care to call it except talent. Behold the fakirs of the town! They know not the fiddle, neither do they sing, and yet I say unto you—— Hang the text! My paraphrase halts; but this is the point, old fellow: New York is the place for you. Don't rust in that sleepy village any longer. Come here and make your bid for fame and fortune. Think it over."

Ordway's heart beat faster. The supreme confidence of his friend excited him. There is nothing like it, the confidence of under thirty. It is dangerously contagious to others under thirty. Billy's own career was stimulative. Had he not gone from a country village, unknown and unheralded, to the city, and had he not "got on," as the saying is?

The musician did think it over. He thought while Billy gabbled, and a little later began tentatively: "I suppose the problem would be more than half solved by getting a start. If I had any influence, or friends, it might be worth thinking of."

"What's the matter with me?" asked Billy.

"Well," admitted Ordway, "I had half imagined that a newspaper man might have influence."

"I don't own the paper, but I could boom you."

Ordway caught his breath. The very suggestion of being exploited in a city newspaper was too alluring and appalling at once to be discussed lightly. He dared

of the fellows. They often give me a concert to do when there are several going at the same time. I could run in paragraphs about you easily enough. You think it over, Bert."

Ordway heard the famous pianist in the evening, and the next night he was again at the opera house. "Lucia" was the bill. It fascinated him with its luscious melodies, and he thought it a very, very great work—not equal to "Faust," of course; and he had a vague perception that the banality of the story was measurably accountable for the lesser value. On this occasion he went early and joined with the hundreds who rushed madly up the stairs to scramble for good places the moment the doors were opened. He found a place in not approach the matter openly. Perhaps Billy would voluntarily tell him how effective boozing could be managed.

"Speaking of that," said Ordway, trying to keep his voice steady, and succeeding so far as Billy's observation went, "just what do you do for the paper?"

"Oh," was the laughing reply, "any old thing! I go to prize fights and symphony concerts with equal non-chalance—and ignorance."

"And success?"

"That's well asked. Why, yes, I guess so. I describe what I see in the coarser events; and as to the finer—well, I've always been interested in music, you know, and I keep up in it fairly well—better than most the front row near the end whence he could see the

prompter's book lying on the stage behind the conical hood, and whence he could look with embarrassing directness into the prima donna's bosom.

About midway in the performance the man sitting beside him went to humming the air that the tenor was singing. Ordway endured in wondering silence for a time. At last he drew back from the rail and shot one glance of supreme disgust at his neighbor. The audience applauded hysterically at the conclusion of the piece. The neighbor turned to Ordway.

"Don't you like music?" he asked.

"I do," replied the rustic, coldly.

"Oh!" and the tone showed that the man was surprised. "I know every note in fourteen operas," he added.

Ordway climbed to a place in the back row, and sat there during the rest of the performance.

The next evening he attended a song recital, and then came the morning of Friday, the last day of his exhilarating vacation. A letter came to him from Billy Jameson, written some time after midnight.

"They've put on 'Faust' again at the opera," he wrote, "and I've asked for the paper's tickets. What's better, I've got 'em. We'll go together, if you like. I shall be busy until late, but come to my room after dinner."

Ordway's programme had not included another opera. He had planned to go to a symphony, but "Faust" in a good seat, and with his friend beside him, was the best finale to his pleasure that could have been devised.

At seven-thirty by the clock he knocked at Billy's room. The reporter opened the door. He was half dressed, and was, in fact, just struggling with a refractory collar of the most impressive height. Ordway gave a gasp of consternation.

"Come in," said Billy. "What's up?"

"Nothing. I'm not up—that's the trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this, Billy: I hadn't thought of the fashionable regulations of the opera house. I'm not dressed for it, and couldn't be if I would. The musical life of East Wilton, you know, doesn't demand that the most conspicuous musician there shall own a dress suit."

Billy stood gaping, his collar in his hand.

"Pooh!" said he, tossing the article across the room. "Do you suppose I dress when I go to the opera? I was just hurrying to get these things off. Had to go out to interview a howling swell after six o'clock, you know, and as I had to look for him at a fashionable function, I put on my uniform. That's all. Sit down a minute till I get into more comfortable clothes."

Ordway sat down, but he was not wholly convinced.

"I'm afraid you're trying to let me down easy," he said. "You would have dressed for the opera if I hadn't been along."

"Rot!" cried the cheerful liar, as he hurriedly reversed his preparations, "I never dress for the opera. Don't you see, I'm going professionally. I have no part in the fashionable aspect of it. Don't you worry."

This was advice too good to be neglected, and Ordway took it. Nevertheless he observed that of all the men in the lower part of the house he and his friend were the only ones who were not "dressed."

The opera renewed the deep impression it had made before. He found beauties in the music that had escaped him the first time; he enjoyed the fact that he was in a good seat, and he missed Miss Julia Ward from the cast. Siebel was played by a young woman with a foreign name. She was graceful and pretty, particularly when she appeared in profile—which she contrived to do with great frequency—and she had a good voice. Ordway critically estimated her as not so good as Miss Ward.

III.

At the last analysis the life of every man is solitary ;
But there are degrees of solitariness ;
And the most extreme is that of him who creates.

—The Hermit.

Home, home to account books and the sodden smell of leather; to rehearsals and services in the First Church; to the solicitous care of a patient and adoring mother; to music paper, and the pianoforte, and one to whose girlish eyes the organist at the First Church was the greatest man in the world.

These persons and things made up the life of East Wilton. All else were scenery, properties and supernumeraries.

If at this point any question should arise as to the precise relationship between Ordway and Barbara Kendall, to whose eyes allusion has just been made, let it frankly be understood that neither of them could remember when they had not been playmates; that so long had East Wilton folk looked upon them as "a match" that gossip had tired of mentioning it; and that no word preliminary to such an understanding had been spoken by either of the principals thereto. When he was six years old Her-

bert was wont to declare that Barbara was his sweet-heart, and he used to put his arms around her in effusive demonstration; and Barbara received his attentions with manifest pleasure and just the touch of shyness that proclaimed her femininity. The men used to chuckle prophetically, and the women say, "La! such dears!" But, such is the way of life! It took but ten short years to eliminate the word "love" from the lad's vocabulary, save as it entered conveniently into certain verses that began early to indicate his devotion to dames of less tangible personality.

Ordway had taken account of his expenditures on the Saturday morning of his departure. He had accomplished his vacation within his appropriation. Billy Jameson could not have done so well. That irrepressible worthy never yet had come to the end of a vacation without the necessity of telegraphing a friend for a loan, or the office for an advance, to save himself a toilsome walk back to the city. Ordway gave himself one unpremeditated luxury—he bought a copy of "Faust."

There was a trying season of struggle to get back into the rut wherein the wheels of his life had seemed to fit. His was not like the case of that man who had to work hard for several weeks to recover from an exhausting vacation; Ordway had been dazzled by a vision of a larger life. Deep in his heart was disquieting fear, almost conviction, that he was not suited for it. His limitations scared him. Could he breast the city's surging

tide? Would he not likely be engulfed by it?

He wondered, and longed, and grew sick at heart when on his way to the factory he saw the white steeple of the First Church.

Mrs. Ordway observed and mourned. She was too wise to speak.

A considerable quantity of good music paper was spoiled during the first weeks after Ordway's return. The Muses and "all the little Muses" were in a bad way for once; feverish, excitable, and their aggressive symptoms were manifested in poems begun and never ended, in fragments of tunes, in anthems that would not work out to a satisfactory climax. There was a piece for the pianoforte that traversed all the keys and stopped abruptly in the midst of shocking dissonances because the harried composer could not for his life conceive of an appropriate ending.

Insensibly the turmoil subsided. Routine told, routine and such measure of good sense as Nature had bestowed upon him. Presently Ordway became aware that he was calmer, and he sent a letter to Billy.

"Leather and cobbler's wax," he wrote, "make a remarkable anaesthetic. They have gotten in their deadly work. I shall not dream further of going to New York."

The two operas had renewed his interest in foreign languages. Whether he analysed his impulses in this matter need not be discussed, the plain fact being that he pored over his own books and others from the town library in search of poems to set to music. On the even-

ing of the day when he posted his letter to Billy he found one that made a sudden appeal to him. It was in Italian. He had read the thing before, but never had seen it in just this light. By that swift mental process that the unthinking call inspiration he perceived a musical form, an introductory scene, then an air, and coincidentally, or apparently so, melodic phrases went to singing in his mind.

He worked till a late hour that night.

A day or two passed, during which, as he toiled over the factory books, his thoughts were never far from the new song. It had not been finished at the first writing. Many of the problems were solved in the factory office, and light on others came to him while he was walking to and fro. Inseparable from his contemplation of the music were visions of public performance. He fancied a famous prima singing it, such a divinity of song as she who had appeared in "Lucia." There rang in his ears the plaudits of a crowded house. He wondered what the critics would say of it.

One phase of the matter did not occur to him at that period—this composition proceeded in its building without embarrassment. It halted, yes, and there were difficulties that corrugated his brow and drove him to furious extemporizations at the pianoforte; but there was none of the aimless, formless, reminiscent confusion that had obstructed him immediately after his return home. This piece was his own, springing into life from the mysterious impulses of the tuneful inner spirit. That

it did not take perfect shape at once was no matter for discouragement; the form was there, somewhere, and by dint of unremitting effort he would find it.

His mother's attention was attracted. "What is it that you are playing and humming all the time now?" she asked.

"An Italian aria, mother," he answered; "it's going to be the best thing I ever did."

She patted his cheek indulgently.

"Every new thing is the best thing, isn't it, Bert?"

"Yes," he answered, seriously, "while it is being made."

There came a free evening and he took his incompletely manuscript to Barbara Kendall.

She, too, was fatherless, and to some degree dependent upon her own exertions; that is, it was only by constant contriving by herself and her mother that their small property was made to support them. Of late years Ordway had cultivated the habit of taking his pieces to her for their first presentation. She sang in his choir, and on many occasions had been of invaluable assistance to him in dragging the sopranos through a manuscript anthem whose progress she had watched from incipiency in pencil to completeness in ink.

He found her sewing industriously by lamplight. Her mother had gone to a neighbor's.

"Is it a new anthem?" she asked, noting the flat parcel under his arm. Ordway regarded it as an unpardonable crime to roll music.

"No," said he. "This is something unlike anything I ever did. Put down your work and see for yourself. It isn't quite finished, but I can give you a pretty good idea of it."

He was already at the instrument, and Barbara stood behind him, her sewing in her hands, her eyes intent upon the music paper.

"This is orchestral, of course," he explained, after he had banged out some preliminary chords, "and you must understand that it's for soprano voice. Don't try to sing it yet. Let me run through it first. That deep note will be given by the kettle-drum. This is for wood wind. Then the voice."

Thus to the end. He paused now and again to repeat a passage, and to explain how it would be scored for orchestra, and twice he stopped to confess that here were gaps that he had not yet decided how to fill.

"But it will lead to this," he added, plunging again into the completed sketch. His face flushed long before he reached the climax, and, fired by the joy of his own creation, he made the staid old instrument quiver in more than its strings, and give forth such shouts and torrential harmonies as if its daily exercise were not upon hymn tunes and bucolic songs.

"There!" he cried, whirling about and looking up at Barbara.

There was the light of admiration and vague trouble

in her eyes. The one he could understand if it had not been alloyed with the other.

"I think it will be very pretty," she ventured.

"Pretty!" he echoed, contemptuously, and he turned his back to her. He strummed discordantly for a moment, and when he paused she added:

"You haven't worked it all out, yet."

"I know," he retorted, petulantly, "but don't you grasp the idea? You've seen through many an anthem that hasn't been half as far along as this."

"Yes."

She sat down, and her needle began a rapid flashing while she bent her head over it.

Ordway gulped at the lump in his throat.

"What's the matter with it, Barbara?" he asked, with something akin to humility in his tone.

"Why, nothing, Bert!" she replied at once, and she looked up. "It's just me, that's all. I don't understand it."

"You don't need to understand if it's beautiful."

Barbara bowed her head again.

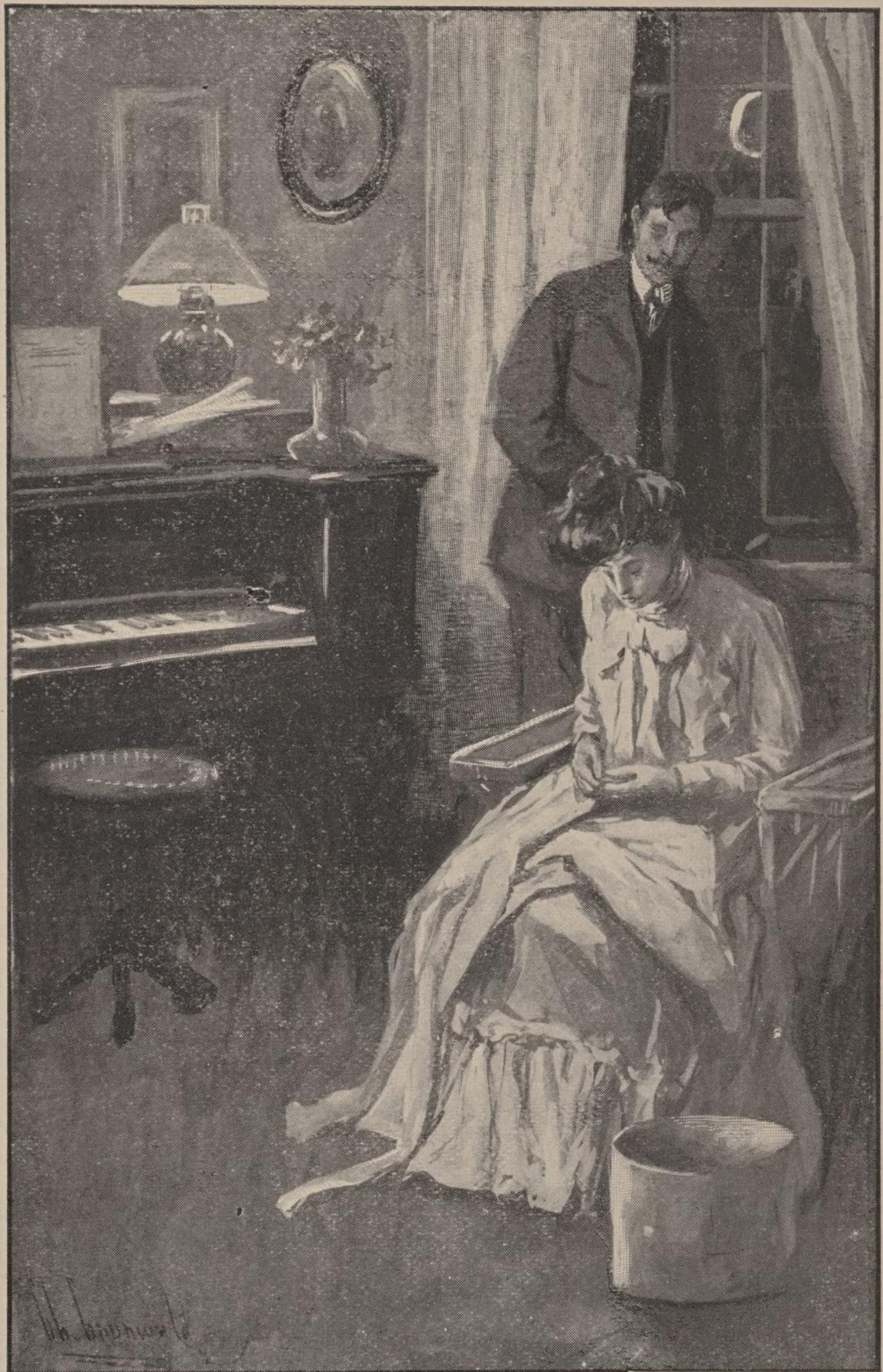
"Doesn't this main theme appeal to you?"

He whirled to the keyboard again and played a few measures.

"Yes," she said, "that is very pretty."

She did not see his shoulders quiver at the adjective.

"And the rest of it," he insisted, his voice grating harshly. "Don't you find anything in it? Doesn't it suggest any sort of comment?"



"What's the matter with it, Barbara?" he asked.

See page 40.

"Why, Bert," she answered, "I've told you honestly that I don't understand it. You don't want me to tell you a lie about it, do you? You don't want me to praise it till I feel sure of myself, do you?"

Ordway was afflicted with incurable honesty of a very delicate kind. It prevented him from answering. He knew in his heart that he would have liked to hear a flattering lie, and yet, not from Barbara.

"Of course, you can't grasp the piece as I do; I know there are things there that I can't bring out. I know it's all right," he said, doggedly. "How is your mother?"

He folded the sheets, but left them on the rack, and went to the window, whence he looked out upon the orchard then filled to intoxication with fragrant bloom. The moon was white on apple and pear tree, white in spots upon the grass where a carpet of petals was making. At that moment the infinite peace and beauty of the scene were to him as a barren ledge. He did not see the tear that fell on Barbara's work.

Presently he made a manful effort to recover from his disappointment. At times before this she had failed to comprehend his work. This was not the first occasion when she had made him suffer. But those other times he had seen, eventually, that she was right. Now—it was different. He knew this work. He had been a fool to exploit it in so imperfect a way.

"Barbara," he said, gently, "let's go out. I think I never saw your trees so covered with blossoms."

She arose at once.

"I wish you could see them by daylight," she said. "All the flowers have come in a rush this spring. I suppose that means they won't last as long as usual."

"I believe I'll get up a half hour earlier to-morrow so as to pass here on my way to work."

They went forth and strolled under the trees, silent for the most part. When they did speak it was not of music. He paused under a tree that spread its smiling branches wide and seemed to fold itself over the senses with caressing benevolence.

"I wonder if there's anything in Central Park equal to this?" he said.

"Never!" cried Barbara. "Don't tell me that your great city is anything but stuffy, and ugly and cruel! I'm so glad New York didn't turn your head, Bert."

"But it did," he responded, ruefully; "turned it clear around so that it's now facing the right way again."

"Then no harm's done," she declared, gaily, and she reached up to pull down a branch, from which she plucked a generous spray of pink and white that she pinned deftly to his coat.

As they neared the house in their content-giving ramble they heard the pianoforte.

"What in the name of goodness!" exclaimed Ordway. He recognized the opening phrases of his new piece.

They hurried in. Mrs. Kendall had returned, and with her came Jane Twitchell, Barbara's cousin. Jane was an elderly young woman, who might have married in some bygone age if it had not been that she quarreled with

her sweetheart. They found his body in the mill pond two days later.

It was a terrible tragedy for her; nobody probably ever realized how terrible, for Jane had her own way of bearing up. As years passed she developed a wit that was not always tempered with discretion, and she never lost opportunity to point a moral with lovers by berating her own folly.

"Served me right for being a silly young fool!" she would say, with infinite self-contempt. "I'll never take the risks of a man's life in my hands again."

As no man had ever besought her to undertake that responsibility Jane's resolution remained unshaken.

It was Jane who was at the instrument.

Ordway strode to the pianoforte and took the sheets away. There was a smile on his face, but it said very plainly, "Mind your own business, Jane."

"Sakes alive!" she protested. "Is that New York manners?"

"It isn't done yet, Jane," said he, still smiling.

"But what's the harm of my finding out what it's going to be while you two go philandering in the orchard and catching rheumatism? Come, Bert; let's hear it."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I told you it wasn't finished."

"But it begins splendidly! Do let's hear some of it!"

I sha'n't mind the lack of finish. I shall know what it's going to be."

Ordway's smile took on a more agreeable cast. The note of appreciation told! But he persisted.

"Jane," said he, roguishly, "you don't know what you're talking about. Ask Barbara."

She didn't ask Barbara, and Barbara volunteered no opinion.

IV.

The way of a man with a maid.
One of the four things that Solomon could not understand.

I think the translators have erred. Solomon surely meant to say, "the way of a maid with a man."
—The Hermit.

Spring, as Barbara had foretold, leaped into Summer, and the hot months dragged by. The time arrived when Ordway's problems were solved. There had been many anxious debates at home, and there had been some correspondence with Billy. The reporter's answer to the letter quoted above, which had arrived while yet the ground was white with fallen bloom, said:

"Don't be an idiot, or, if you must, come here where idiocy may be turned to account."

One Sunday afternoon, it was the time when boughs that had been white bent under burdens of brown and gold, Ordway found Barbara in the orchard.

"Barbara," said he, "I am going away."

Does it smack of the conventional romance? It cannot be helped. Such was the beginning of their scene, and thus it often begins in real life as well as in books. In this instance the announcement failed to take the woman by surprise.

"You have thought it all over," she said, half-inquiringly, half-affirmatively.

"Yes," he said.

"And your mother approves?"

"Yes. The question of living is settled. I went to New York last Monday to try for the position as organist that Billy recommended me for, and the place is mine. I received notice of the appointment last night. I shall send the money to mother every month. For myself, I shall hustle, as Billy says."

She looked intently at the ground. It was impossible just then to meet his eyes, for she knew intuitively what was there.

"I hope it will be for the best, Bert," she said.

"It must be," he responded, singularly quiet. Then, "Barbara, I am going away at once, for my duties as organist begin next Sunday. As I come to the time of leaving I realize that I've always loved you, ever since I can remember, Barbara. We've never spoken of this. Somehow it didn't seem necessary. Tell me——"

He was reaching for her hand, the hand he had clasped so many times in childish rambles through the woods and fields, but she anticipated him, turning upon him suddenly, taking his hand in both her own, and interrupting him.

"Oh, Bert!" she said, and there was anguish in her tone, "are you sure—very sure?"

"Sure!" he echoed, amazed. "Sure of what?"

"That you love me?"

"Why, how could I be mistaken? With all my life to look back on——"

"I know; but, Bert, just because you have seen me always it does not prove that there will not be some other better fitted for your peculiar needs, some one who can enter into your life more completely——"

"Nonsense, Barbara! I know my own needs. You are a thousand times too good for me——"

"That isn't it, Bert; how can you know what you have told me?"

He did not understand her at all.

"Barbara," he said, "do you doubt my love for you?"

"No," she answered, hesitatingly, and her great eyes searched his.

"Then it is yourself," he cried.

She shook her head.

"I think everything of you, Bert; but love is such a great thing! It ought to last so long, and endure so much, and be equal to any sacrifice."

"No sacrifice would be too great, Barbara."

The lashes never seemed to close over her eyes. She searched him as if she had been turned to stone. He felt her hands growing cool on his own.

"Bert," she said, sombrely, "a woman demands as much from a man as a man from a woman. Could you give up your music for me?"

"Give up my music!" he gasped. "Give up my music. You don't mean that you want me to do that?"

"If you had to choose, Bert, which would it be?"

He did not answer her at once; he did not answer the question at all, for when he spoke it was to say:

"Listen, Bert. I know what you would say. You think you wouldn't mind when I failed to understand
"You cannot love me and ask that."

A tear rolled down her cheek.

"We are so different," she faltered.

And during the pause, and while she spoke, rebellion, hot rebellion, rose from wounded pride within him. Give up music! Was this the substance of the admiration she had seemed to show for his genius? Could she be so cruel as to demand the surrender of his career for her love?"

"You do not love me, Barbara," he said, and he withdrew his hand; "you don't know what love is, or you wouldn't torture me so."

She bowed her head.

"A man loves with all the force of his nature," he proceeded, hotly; "he doesn't stop to consider details—he cannot. His love is overwhelming and imperative, and it simply asks in return the trust that it gives spontaneously. Barbara, that is my love."

He paused, choking. No answer from the downcast girl before him.

"You have feared to have me go to the city," he resumed. "Have you no confidence in me——"

"Oh, Bert," she cried, "I believe in you! You are honorable, your ambition is high, and it is that I am afraid of. I am not your equal in the art you aspire to. I should be a drag on you——"

"If that is all——"

"Listen, Bert. I know what you would say. You think you wouldn't mind when I failed to understand your deepest thoughts and feelings. But think how young you are, how little you have seen of the world, and the terribly busy life you will have in the city."

She shuddered. It was the thought of the city—something strange, complex, perilous, teeming with unknown possibilities beyond the extravagant fancies of a thousand dreams. A shadow had fallen upon her life. It was the city. She saw not what cast it, but she saw the shadow. It chilled her, terrified her.

Barbara Kendall was a country girl. There have been men of supposed strength whose hearts have shrank with vague apprehension when first they looked into the dark maw of London or New York.

Ordway smiled indulgently. He repressed for the moment that stinging resentment that came from her challenge.

"I believe I'm not noted for infatuation with every pretty face I see," he suggested, lightly.

Barbara's brows contracted for an instant.

"You know I was not thinking of anything like that," she responded, and her tone was almost cool. Then it was eager, tremulous, as she added: "Bert, may not a woman be exacting? May she not ask that her husband shall hold her more dear than all else in the world?"

"You doubt me, Barbara."

"I am afraid."

"You do not love me. You despise my music. You think me a weakling in the art——"

"No——"

"Yes, you do! If not you wouldn't raise these doubts. You would believe in me. Love doesn't see, much less seek for disparagements."

Humbled, defeated, she bowed her head again. He turned from her, quivering with wounded pride, humiliated, broken in the way he had least anticipated.

"Bert," she said, and he wheeled about. "Cannot we be friends?"

For a long minute they faced one another in silence.

"I cannot understand you, Barbara," he said at last.

"I am sorry; but we can be friends, can't we? I want to be your friend, Bert."

A flash of pain crossed his face.

"Yes," he said, shutting his teeth together, "I suppose we can be friends. Good-bye."

He held out his hand. She clasped it again in both her own.

"Good-bye," said she.

ALLEGRO.

I.

See how we apples swim!

—Old Saw.

Boxford was in its annual condition of artistic ferment. Music, that had laid dormant for months, save in the weekly meetings of the choral society, was up and at work. The festival was on. Gentlemen whom the suffrages of their fellow-citizens never had elevated as high as the Common Council were temporarily conspicuous. There were foreign names on the hotel registers, and at the principal hostelry the enterprising management had taken on an additional bellboy and laid in a hundred-weight of corn starch, with an eye to an unusual demand for ice cream.

Residents of moderate means thought twice when they were besought by wives and daughters to get tickets; the wives and daughters thought two hundred times apiece as to what they should wear; wealthy residents wondered languidly what their proportion of the deficit would be.

Everybody who was anybody talked of Guarda—Guarda, the incomparable, the bright, particular star of the festival; Guarda, who, according to frantic press

announcements, had enthralled the capitals of Europe and turned the heads of three kings. Her picture was in nearly every store window; her name fairly roared from the billboards. There were to be other singers and instrumentalists, but, bless you! their names were to be measured in contemptible inches; Guarda's in feet.

It may be remarked parenthetically, and with some timidity for the intrusion, that musical works were to be performed that certain simple-minded persons regarded with reverence; but having set down so much merely with a view to historical completeness, let nothing else be whispered to diminish in any wise the abundant glory of the prima donna. The annual music festival was on, and the critics were sharpening their pencils; but, in the terse language of the day, Guarda was IT.

It was morning, and in the great hall where the concerts were given preparations were making for a rehearsal. On the platform were half a hundred men with fiddles of various sizes and other music machines. Some were blowing and scraping A's and empty fifths, some were grumbling at the length of the programmes; some were demonstrating to their own satisfaction and that of their listeners that the conductor was an ass. The librarian went from one to another distributing parts. There were piles of music sheets on the edge of the platform near the south door. Each pile represented one number on the programme. The librarian was methodically lessening the number of piles by scattering their elements among the players.

About midway in the main aisle were several men with overcoats on. There was Mr. Alexander, president of the choral society; Mr. Lord, chairman of the financial committee; Mr. Louis Biddle, chairman of the programme committee; Mr. Horace Clark, chairman of the chorus committee, and some lesser lights, bankers and merchants who had no official designations, but who made up for that in the alacrity with which they ran on errands. And there was also Mr. William Jameson, the first of the "visitors from a distance," as Boxford called the New York critics, to arrive. It was the same Billy, though nearly three years older than when first he appeared in this chronicle, and he kept his face straight, to the great discomfort of his sleeves, when the Boxford gentlemen referred to him as a critic. Billy's paper had sent him to "do" the festival, that was all. Nothing had been said about criticism. Billy said as much when Mr. Alexander asked him, with more eagerness than tact, if Mr. Bosworth were not coming.

Mr. Bosworth, be it understood, was the musical critic for Billy's paper, and, in the minds of Boxford, Mr. Bosworth was a very great man indeed. No festival was ever regarded as quite complete, no matter how large the deficit, if it had not been illumined by his presence.

"The fact is, gentlemen," said Billy, addressing the group generally, "that Boz couldn't foresee very serious employment for his pen. You haven't put on any important novelties this year, you know."

His lips were parted, and he had caught his breath to

go on with an argument showing the advisability of bringing out new works each year, especially American works, and that would have been followed speedily by direct suggestion of the works of a certain native composer whom Billy could recommend, and of whom it had not as yet been the good fortune of Boxford to hear; but the sombre gravity that came upon the faces of the festival managers, and the significant glances they exchanged, warned him to go slow. The shot had hit the mark. Another at once might destroy the target. Billy decided quickly to bide his time and wait for the opportunity. It came soon, and in the most unexpected way.

"That's just what I've maintained all along," said Biddle, aggressively. "We must get novelties, but——"

"But," interrupted Mr. Lord, "we've had to economize this year, Mr. Jameson, and so we're trying familiar works to see how the public will take them."

"And as to novelties," added Biddle, "there's Guarda. It's her first appearance in America."

"Bosworth can hear Guarda when she comes to New York next month," said Billy.

"Yes," admitted the chairmen and subordinates, in rueful chorus.

"Of course, gentlemen," continued Billy, with grand condescension of manner, "I shall do the best I can for you in what I write about the festival. I hope sincerely that you will be successful; but if you want to enlist the attention of serious critics and raise your enterprise to

the dignity of a national event you must bring on new works."

It was not the great Mr. Bosworth who spoke thus oracularly, but was it not to be supposed that these were the reflections of his sentiments? At all events, this was a New York newspaper man—pardon me, journalist should be the word—and he was armed for the time being with the pen of the critic. Accordingly the committeemen and others were nodding deferentially, as was fitting in the presence of so exalted a personage, when one of them exclaimed, excitedly, "Ah! there's Guarda!"

The divinity of song was, indeed, walking serenely down the aisle on the north side of the hall. Behind her went a tall, slender man, whose white mustache, waxed and pointed, was startlingly conspicuous against the background of his swarthy skin. He carried a large, square parcel under his arm, in spite of which his demeanor was oppressively haughty.

"A-a-a-h!" breathed the committeemen and others, in tones of deep satisfaction.

Led by the president, they hastened down the aisle and across in front of the platform to meet the divinity. On the way they threw down their hats. Before her they inclined their heads to the level of their knees, and spread out their arms, holding their palms downward. They pulled off their overcoats and laid them upon the floor that she might have a carpet to walk on as far as the green-room. Silence fell upon the band. Every man of them closed his eyes and lay flat upon his face.

Meantime the committeemen and others chanted an original greeting, to music composed by Louis Biddle:

“O daughter of the round, full moon!
Thy slaves beg leave to worship thee!
We didn’t think you’d come so soon——”

But, pish! tush! what an irresponsible vagabond is imagination! All this, of course, is bald fiction. It was in Boxford, not Bagdad; cool, sedate New England, not the effusive Orient. The committeemen didn’t lay down their coats; they didn’t say they were slaves, in so many words; the band didn’t cease its cacophonous tuning up. In fact, the only man in the band who paid the slightest attention to the divinity was the third bassoon, who happened to stand up at that moment and see her.

“Ach, Gott!” said he to the second clarinet, “I haf blayed mit her in Dresden, yah. Ein oper-concert, yah. Ach, Gott! vat a woice! Yah!”

Then he sat down and played scales in B flat.

What really happened, to all outward appearances, was nothing more than very cordial and very respectful greetings on the part of a number of gentlemen to a lady in whom they had great interest, and who returned their salutations with queenly graciousness; but human nature, you know, is the same the world over; it is only the superficial manner that differs. If this had been Bagdad instead of Boxford, there isn’t a shadow of doubt that the committeemen would have carpeted the divinity’s pathway with their coats, and to a moral cer-

tainty they would have chanted something like Louis Biddle's song.

Robbed of its eastern picturesqueness, the scene, nevertheless, was amusing to Billy Jameson, who viewed it from a distance.

"She's a handsome girl," he reflected, "but in street dress what is there about her to suggest that she is anything more than, say, the wife of Boxford's mayor?"

Nobody paid the slightest attention to His Haughtiness with the square parcel. He looked over the heads of the committeemen and saw the librarian taking up a pile of music sheets from the edge of the platform at the south side. With severe gravity he stalked over to that side, laid his parcel beside the piles of music, and stalked back. By that time Guarda and the committeemen had disappeared in the green-room, and he followed them.

The divinity was delightfully gracious.

"You do us distinguished honor," said Mr. Alexander, "by being so prompt. We had not looked for you for another hour. The conductor himself has not arrived yet."

"I'll go find him," exclaimed an inconspicuous banker, and he shot out of the door.

"It doesn't matter at all," replied Guarda, pleasantly, and with perfect command of the English language. "I have never kept anybody waiting yet, and I do not mean to begin dilatoriness in Boxford."

"But it is a pity that you should be kept waiting—you

of all persons," said Biddle, and he smiled that ingenuous, winning smile that has smothered so many an indignant protest.

"I like to wait," declared the divinity. "A rehearsal is such fun! Don't you think so?"

The question was general, but her flashing eyes rested as she finished on those of Horace Clark, and that sincere gentleman, greatly embarrassed, blushed, shuffled his feet, thrust his hands convulsively into his pockets and stammered that he guessed so; it depended.

Whereupon Guarda gave a rippling laugh that said plainer than any words could have expressed it that Horace Clark had uttered the brightest of witticisms. The chairman of the finance committee upheld the illusion.

"Mr. Clark, as chairman of the chorus committee," said he, "has probably found that the fun of rehearsals is not always unalloyed."

Guarda laughed again, and everybody was in vast good humor.

Then the conductor hurried in, winning a race with the banker by a neck.

"I'm awfully sorry——" he began.

"Don't," she interrupted shaking hands; "I'm ahead of time. Don't pay any attention to me."

This remark was interpreted, as doubtless the divinity meant that it should be, to mean that attention should not be paid to anything or anybody else.

"You can rehearse at once, if you like," said the conductor.

"No," she replied, seriously, "I'd rather not. The hall is cold. Call me when it has warmed up."

Before she had finished this brief speech three committee-men were pelting downstairs to the boiler-room to have an animated session with the engineer.

"Well," said the conductor, doubtfully, "I was going to begin with the Tschaikowsky symphony. That will take three-quarters of an hour, I fear."

"Go ahead with it—do!" said Guarda. "I'll make these gentlemen entertain me."

She sat down then, and the bosoms of the committee-men who remained were like to burst with happiness.

The conductor trotted out to the platform and rapped on his desk.

"Symphony," said he.

The librarian had not finished distributing parts, but the symphony was there, and the players ceased their discordant racket to get its pages in order before them.

In a moment the rehearsal began with one solitary auditor. Midway in the great hall sat Billy. His over-coat was buttoned to his chin, and he had a programme book in his hands. He had glanced at it before, but now he had time to study it. Several works, or fragments of works, were distinguished by the announcement: "First time in Boxford"; one only had the stirring line, "First time in America."

The piece thus exalted was an aria composed by a

foreigner expressly for Guarda. It was understood that she had bought the manuscript and all rights for the sake of having at least one display piece that could be sung by no hated rival. She was to sing the soprano solos in a cantata and in an oratorio during the course of the festival, and one air from a standard opera at the miscellaneous concert; but she herself banked heavily upon the new piece, and the management had not concealed the fact that it was to be performed. Prices for the miscellaneous concert, in which it was to be the leading feature, had been doubled.

"I wonder if it's any good?" mused Billy.

There was little in the programme book on which to base a judgment or a prejudice. The words of every vocal number except this were printed. Guarda's letter from across the sea, in which she enclosed a copy of the words, had arrived in Boxford after the programme book went to press.

The symphony wound its majestic way to a conclusion. Meantime other persons had entered the hall. There was Herr Thingumbob, the burly basso, who walked in with such impressive ponderosity that small boys at the door were quite sure that he was the whole festival. Intimate friends of the distinguished Herr have been heard to confess that such was substantially his own opinion. Then there came Herr Poppenmann-Humperfeldt, the world-renowned tenor, with his quick, nervous stride, and that expression of unvarying sadness on his face, as if he realized his responsibilities to the full. Poppen-

mann-Humperfeldt went straight to the green-room. Guarda stood up, with a charming smile, and held out her hand. He raised it to the level of his topknot, brought it down with a jerk, and said, incisively, "So, ve meet again!" Then he wheeled about and sang a tentative scale. "Br-r-r-r!" he shivered, "vat a climate!"

And there were others ranged along the wall at the back of the auditorium. These were favored friends of the committeemen, to whom word had been passed that Guarda was about to sing her new piece.

II.

There is patience that accomplishes its purpose by sheer force of waiting; and there is audacity that goes to the giddy verge of the reprehensible. I have not lived long enough to be sure which I admire the more.

—The Hermit.

The conductor left his desk and went in person to the greenroom to summon Guarda.

“Now, if you are quite ready,” said he.

Her rippling laugh was infectious of ingenuous pleasure.

“You are all so very kind to me!” she said. “Really, I am falling distractedly in love with Boxford. Come, then,” and she took the conductor’s arm quite as if the event were a performance before a crowded house.

A dozen seraphic smiles, each concealing a committee-man, followed her into the hall.

“Never,” said Mr. Doddington, an emeritus member of the general committee, who was reputed to have personal recollections of three-hundred-and-fifteen annual festivals, “never, sir, have we been honored by a guest of more charming personality, more winning grace of manner, and, I dare say, sir, more mellifluous voice.”

“That will soon be demonstrated,” responded a colleague.

Guarda and the conductor mounted the steps to the

platform. The fiddlers rapped upon their desks with their bows, and the wind players shuffled their feet.

The divinity bowed to them and bestowed upon them the very warmest of her winning smiles.

Out in the middle of the hall Billy Jameson put down his programme book and folded his arms, all attention.

Then a most extraordinary thing happened.

The conductor rapped, said "Aria," and went to pulling over the books on his desk to find the score of Guarda's piece. The men in the band looked through their respective parts.

Presently the conductor glanced inquiringly at the librarian, who at the moment was standing behind the tympani, and the first viola half arose and asked:

"Vat it is ve blay, hein?"

"The aria," said the conductor, sharply. "Where is the aria?"

The librarian came down through the band.

"I haf all the parts give out already," he said, with a perturbed glance at the south edge of the platform, where the piles of music had been.

That part of the platform was certainly innocent of any forgotten score.

The conductor turned to Guarda.

"Of course, you brought the score and parts?" he said, with just a shade of inquiry in his tone.

"Certainly," she answered; "I shouldn't be likely to come away without them."

She turned to His Haughtiness and beckoned imperiously.

"What did you do with the score?" she asked in Italian.

He answered in the same tongue, indicating the exact spot where he had laid the important parcel.

"You must be mistaken!" she cried. "It would be there or on the desks. Think, Giuseppe—where did you put it?"

One of the second violins at the last desk stood up to say that he saw the gentleman put the parcel down.

"I haf give all der parts out," protested the librarian.

The conductor again overhauled the books on his desk, and the men in the band did likewise.

An angry frown came upon Guarda's handsome face. She stamped her foot and turned impatiently to the first violin.

"What a nuisance!" she exclaimed.

The first violin shrugged his shoulders and rested his instrument negligently against his knee. What was an aria more or less to him?

"Ach, Gott!" said the third bassoon, settling back in his chair. There was no aria among the parts that had been laid on his desk.

For once the conductor looked helpless. Perspiration was rolling down the cheeks of the perplexed librarian.

Biddle, his features twisted by anxiety, went hastily to the front.

"Is there something wrong?" he asked, looking from Guarda to the conductor, and standing on tip-toe, for the platform was high.

"My music cannot be found," answered the divinity, and she glared at the diplomatic Biddle as if he were responsible for the calamity.

That put him on his mettle. He tried his most killing smile on her.

"Oh! surely, it must be," said he, with easy confidence.

"Then find it!" she snapped.

To his credit be it recorded that the smile never left Biddle's face. He spoke to the subordinate committeemen who were gathering about, each with his own expression of infinite distress.

"Go into the property-room," said Biddle, "and the dressing-rooms, and the library, everywhere, and look for the prima donna's music. It is here somewhere, of course."

He went with them. They opened closets, looked under overcoats, rummaged the entire collection of works that were to be done at the festival, and returned to the front, empty-handed. Meantime Guarda had stood, a very queen in her petulance, disdaining the chair that the worried conductor had offered her. There was a spot of bright red on each cheek that anybody would have known was not put there by artifice of the toilet.

Billy arose and strolled down to the platform, where the distressed committeemen stood with their heads

thrown back on their shoulders to look up at the singer and the conductor.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

The question was addressed particularly to Biddle, who was always recognized by "visitors from a distance" as the best purveyor of official information; but Biddle was trying to soothe Guarda, and it was Mr. Alexander who answered.

"The prima donna's music has disappeared in the strangest way," he said. "We don't know what to make of it."

"Ha!" said Billy, "what an item!"

Biddle heard and wheeled suddenly about. There was a look of consternation on his pale face, but it was almost banished immediately by his ready smile.

"Have mercy on us, Mr. Jameson!" he said. "This missing piece was our only novelty——"

"Which makes the news all the more interesting," interrupted Billy, with equal suavity.

Mr. Alexander looked as if he wished the visitor from a distance had not been invited to attend the rehearsal. But he, too, was a diplomat.

"I suppose you'll have to print something about it in duty to your paper," he said; "but I do hope you'll make as little of it as possible."

"See here, Mr. Jameson!" cried Biddle, making a desperate effort to be gay, "aren't you susceptible to bribery?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Billy, good humoredly. "I brought cigars with me."

The committeemen tried to look pleasant, but they made a sorry failure of it.

"This gives us an awful black eye," sighed Biddle. "Our only novelty! If it had been the Beethoven symphony, you see, it could have been replaced in time."

"Oh, pshaw!" responded Billy, "you'll find the thing."

He went back to his seat, for the conductor was rapping and Guarda was sweeping majestically from the ball.

The rehearsal proceeded. For an hour the committeemen went frantically hither and yon, all bent on the same fruitless quest, to discover that music in some unexpected place. They buttonholed one another from time to time to ask what they should do about it. Of course, an aria from a standard opera could be substituted, and in all probability the audience would be as well pleased. "For," said the committeemen, quite truthfully, "it is Guarda they pay to hear, not the music." But to confess that they could not give the dear public the only promised novelty was a bitter pill, to none more bitter than to Louis Biddle, chairman of the programme committee. To him went Billy at the end of the rehearsal.

"Found that music?" he asked.

"No," replied Biddle, his hard worked smile all awry. "I'll give you a headline for your story about it—'Missing Music.' How's that for alliteration?"

"The alliteration is all right," said Billy, "but let me

make a suggestion. I've got an idea that I think may interest you."

"For heaven's sake, spring it!" cried Biddle, grasping at straws.

Billy led the distressed programme-maker into a corner.

"This music that has disappeared was an Italian piece, I take it," said Billy.

"Yes."

"Well, what's the matter with putting in place of it an Italian aria that never has been heard anywhere? The audience won't know the difference, for, luckily, the words haven't been printed in the programme book. I know of just such a composition," Billy went on, rapidly, for Biddle's eyes were glowing with interest. "It was written by a young fellow in New York as a kind of an experiment in the style, don't you know? It's a stunner! I'll bet my head that as music it's a hundred per cent better than the thing that has been lost. I can get that piece here by midnight; Guarda can look it over, learn it; the band can rehearse it to-morrow, and there you are. Nobody will know the difference, for we'll keep the information to ourselves."

"By jove! Mr. Jameson, but that's a luminous idea!" exclaimed Biddle, in a tone hardly above a whisper. "We can give it out that the aria has been found, eh?"

"Sure! Guarda left it at the hotel, you know—got it mixed with other music, or something."

"Yes, I believe it could be worked. But what about

the composer—this young man you speak of—will he consent?"

"Well," Billy answered, "that's a question; but I think he will. I'll use what influence I have with him for the sake of the festival. I know him pretty well. Of course, if you don't care for the suggestion, I'll say no more about it; but, really, I shall be sorry to report that you had to abandon the one novelty——"

"Oh, Lord! don't mention it! Let's see if something can be done in the way you suggest. We'll take it for granted that you can persuade the composer. What about Guarda?"

"There's no sense in speculating about Guarda. You can find what her attitude is quickly enough. Go and ask her."

"Spare me!" gasped Biddle, trying to smile. "She's in a temper that I've no desire to face."

"Will her temper improve if nothing is done to remedy the situation? You might tackle her right after luncheon. She'll be feeling better then."

"Pooh! she won't eat anything till she's cooled down, and that will be a question of many hours."

"Then face it now. I'll go with you, if you like."

"Will you?"

"Certainly. I'll take the whole brunt of it. You introduce me and stand by to throw in the soft answers that turn away wrath if I get stuck. Will you try it?"

The question was unnecessary. Biddle had grasped the reporter by the arm.

"Come along," said the programme-maker. "We'll have it over with as soon as possible. It's a daring thought, and maybe Guarda has just the spirit to relish it. I can see that she has some sense of humor."

"Then I'll bank on her surrender. Sense of humor, eh? I'll work that—well, we can only try."

They went to the hotel. Mr. Clark met them on the way.

"Have you——" he began, anxiously.

Billy nudged Biddle, who did not need the cue.

"No," said the chairman of the programme committee, "we haven't found it yet; but I've got a new idea. I fancy it was left accidentally in Guarda's hotel in New York and some other piece brought here in place of it. I am going to get her to institute an inquiry by telegraph."

"Say," said Billy, as they went on, "there's a job waiting for you in a newspaper office I know of if you can keep up that average of lying."

"Oh!" groaned Biddle, "I'm equal to most anything in an emergency."

When they stepped into the hotel lobby Billy excused himself for a moment.

"I want to get something in my room," he said. "You can send up our cards and arrange for the interview while I'm gone."

Biddle assented to this, and the reporter hurried to his room. His eyes were blazing with excitement that he had repressed during his conversation with Biddle.

He caught sight of himself in the mirror as he passed, and noted the symptoms.

"That won't do," he muttered. "I'll spoil the game if I show too much interest in it."

Then he unbuttoned his overcoat and took from beneath it a square parcel that had been hugged to his manly bosom for more than two hours. He put it in a drawer of his bureau and laid some shirts over it.

That done, he composed his features to a dead level of indifference and went down to the office to rejoin Biddle.

III.

Oh, don't the days seem dark and long
When all is right, and nothing's wrong?
And isn't your life extremely flat
When there's nothing whatever to grumble at?
—“Princess Ida,” W. S. Gilbert.

When things go awry it is highly advisable that there should be somebody at hand upon whom disappointment may be vented. This is not always practicable, for some of us are not married; but Guarda had Elise.

Before starting to the hall for rehearsal the incomparable had instructed her maid to have ready a particularly fetching costume to be donned as soon as the trial was over, for Mr. Alexander was going to take her for a drive around Boxford. At noon, Guarda had said, and Elise had the garments ready at eleven, for Elise was no sluggard.

It was two minutes past eleven when Guarda arrived at her suite in the hotel. The obsequious elevator boy opened the door for her, and she strode in. At the moment Elise was bending over a chair whereon lay a cloak that she was brushing, and before she could turn to greet her mistress Guarda was at the further window, yanking off her gloves.

“Ah! madame,” said Elise, “you quite take the breath!
It will be a long half hour before returns my dear

madame, I was thinking. Ah, well! it was a good rehearsal, was it not?"

"There was no rehearsal," responded dear madame, explosively.

"No?" And the surprise of all Gaul was in the tone. "What then? Is it that the conductor was a beast? Did he dare——"

"The conductor couldn't help himself, I suppose. My aria has disappeared. What are these things here for?"

"These things" were the garments that Elise had been instructed to have ready. Guarda had turned from the window, throwing her gloves upon the floor.

"Madame is to drive at noon," responded Elise; "madame told me——"

"Madame will not drive!"

"Not drive?"

"I will not! Take those things away. Get them out of my sight. Oh! was there ever such a stupid——"

"Madame is thinking of the conductor? Or perhaps the manager?" murmured Elise, half-inquiringly, as she began tranquilly to remove the objectionable garments.

"I am not thinking of the conductor, or the manager, or the noodles who divide the management! I am thinking of you!"

"Ah!" said Elise, with no shadow of irony, "madame does me too much honor."

Madame towered, helpless for the moment, in her rage. She knew Elise, and, what is more to the point, Elise knew her. Never had there been the like of this

to disturb the prima's equanimity, but there had been other things such as fall to the lot of all great vocalists, and the maid had learned to take the storms that followed as a part of the business.

"La!" she would have said, if she had been put to it, "what does madame pay me for?"

So Elise calmly put away the garments that she had made ready, and Guarda, after a furious glance at her unterrified menial, went to pulling over music that lay on the pianoforte. In fact, Elise was deeply troubled. It was a serious matter, this unexplained loss of important music. She was not only concerned about it, but curious.

"Madame has lost her music?" ventured the girl, after the garments had been put away.

"No!" cried Guarda, all out of patience, "but somebody has lost it for me."

"Perhaps m'sieu——"

"Send him to me!"

"Yes, madame."

Elise went forth disappointed. She had received no real light on the matter. Willingly would she have endured scolding and tyranny for the sake of information that might drop from between the lines, and it was not long before she had her fill of both; for, after the visit of m'sieu to the prima's parlor, Elise was recalled and put to no end of preposterous tasks for the single purpose of relieving the incomparable's overstrained nerves,

all of which was unalloyed joy for the well-seasoned menial.

In response to Guarda's command, His Haughtiness came, but, ah! my countrymen, how was the mighty humbled! That military bearing, that inscrutability of countenance, that bristling symbol of dignified years upon the upper lip—these availed him nothing. In vain he held out his hands, shrugged his shoulders in deprecatory gesture, and protested that he had taken the aria, score and parts, to the hall, and laid them, quite in the usual way, with the other music set out for rehearsal.

He should have held to it until the librarian took it from his hands! Did he look into the parcel to see what it was he was carrying? No. That was it—take things for granted; never assume the least ITEM of responsibility, but permit her to suffer mortification—PAH! let him get out of her SIGHT! Go to his room, she told him, and stay there till DINNER TIME.

His Haughtiness protested by not so much as a sigh, but turned away, going not to his room, but to the hotel billiard-hall, where he consumed a score of cigarettes, and watched the representatives of Boxford's leisure class playing bottle pool.

By noon, what with her temper and her industrious efforts to soothe it at the expense of Elise, Guarda was well-nigh exhausted. It wanted but one more stroke, the curt dismissal of Mr. Alexander when he should come to take her to drive, and then she would go to bed and have a good, hard headache, just to spite her-

self, and the festival, and everything. Elise brought her two cards. She saw Biddle's first, and threw it contemptuously back upon the salver. The other lingered between her thumb and forefinger for a full half minute.

Shall we say just what it was that wrought a sudden and complete change in the prima donna's demeanor, as well as in her mood? It was not the name of Mr. William E. Jameson; that she had never seen or heard of before; but down in the corner, in small, neat type, were words of momentous import—the name of Billy's paper; and that the prima donna had heard of a great many times.

"I will see them," she said, and Elise conveyed the message to the bellboy.

In due course, then, behold Louis Biddle and Billy Jameson in the presence of the incomparable.

"Have you found my score, Mr. Biddle?" asked Guarda, in a tone of sorely tried but never yielding patience.

"No—not yet," replied Biddle, his smile industriously at work; "but there is hope. We have come to convey it. Permit me to present," and so forth.

Guarda gave Billy her hand most graciously.

"I can quite understand," said he, by way of turning from conventional phrases, "that you have no wish to see a stranger at this time."

"On the contrary," she responded, "it is very kind of you to call. I think I saw you at the rehearsal"—she

paused for a prettily forced laugh—"the rehearsal that didn't rehearse."

"I was there, and awfully sorry for you. Am I to understand that the music has not been found?"

"Not a trace of it. It is provokingly mysterious. I don't know what I am to do. Tell me, Mr. Jameson."

Biddle's eyes glowed hopefully. He had not anticipated that she would open the way to Billy's proposition; but the reporter was too wary to enter at once.

"Can't you substitute something for the missing number?" he asked.

"I shall have to," she replied, "but it is so annoying to give up the piece that was announced. I dislike to put on a hackneyed song, and, above all, to go before an audience with an apology."

"There is no need to do so, Miss Ward—pardon me," and Billy tried to blush. He failed utterly to charge his cheeks with color, but he did manage to look embarrassed. "You see," he added, hastily, "your Italianized name doesn't lie so close to my lips as that under which I first had the pleasure of hearing you. First impressions are hard to overcome, Madame Guarda, and when I think of you I always associate with you the name under which you sang so charmingly as Siebel, three years ago."

Ah, Billy! you have much to answer for! The unblushing rogue never had heard the prima donna sing, never had set eyes on her before this blessed morning; but he knew, as did all who kept the run of musical

events, that Miss Julia Ward, after her one trial appearance in New York, for which she had paid the management a handsome price, had gone to Europe, and that the incomparable Giulia Guarda was she of whom he had heard his friend, Herbert Ordway, speak reminiscently as one in the cast of the first opera he ever heard.

The incomparable was anything but offended.

"Don't apologize, Mr. Jameson," she said; "it's like a breath of home air to hear my old name spoken in so pleasant a way. You were about to say——"

"That I think you can keep your engagement with the public just as well as not—that is, if you don't mind playing a good joke on the public."

"A joke?" and Guarda sought vainly for illumination in Biddle's persistent smile. "You mystify me, Mr. Jameson."

"That's because I haven't made my suggestion yet."

Billy had been feeling his way, all unknown to Guarda; he had been sounding her, and now he plunged into his scheme, arguing it as he had argued with Biddle, and maintaining ever that he was moved by warm interest in the festival. Guarda looked him straight in the eyes as he went on and never interrupted.

"Is this composer a friend of yours, Mr. Jameson?" she asked, when he had finished.

"Yes," he answered with engaging frankness and perhaps some relief that he could speak the truth for once, "an intimate friend, or I shouldn't know about the piece and wouldn't venture to recommend it. Of course, you

must understand that I don't want my recommendation to weigh for anything. I merely offer this suggestion as a way out of an unpleasant dilemma. You will judge the piece for yourself, and if it doesn't suit, have an apology published, let the story of the loss get into the papers, and sing an air from 'Trovatore,' or any old thing."

"What if somebody in the audience should recognize the substitute?"

"If that were possible, my suggestion would be valueless. This aria has never been displayed, not even to Mr. Ordway's friends. He has kept it to himself for some reason that I can't fathom. In the first place he is the incarnation of modesty, doesn't know how to push himself, don't you know—a genius and a thoroughly good fellow. Why! he even speaks kindly of his landlord."

This testimony to the beauty of Ordway's character seemed to be lost on Guarda, but Biddle chuckled. The prima was still in doubt.

"If he keeps it to himself," she said, "how do you know so much about it?"

"Oh! I surprised him at it and simply made him reel it off to me. I give you my word of honor that it's worth hearing——"

"That is wholly unnecessary," Guarda interrupted. "I should not dream of disputing your judgment, though of course a singer must decide for herself whether or not a song is suited to her."

"Certainly. I merely suggest that you hear the piece."

"But would the composer—Mr. Ordway, did you say?—would he consent to let his music be performed without credit to himself?"

"Could any composer decline if Guarda were to be the singer?"

"Why! What a past master of flattery you are! There's no resisting such an appeal. Tell me, honestly, Mr. Jameson, do you want me to sing your friend's aria?"

The guilty rogue came near to blushing then. The question lay on the very borders of suspicion, but he kept his head and perceived that the one safe course was to answer truthfully.

"Yes," he said, "under the circumstances I should like it very much."

"Very well," said she, "you may send for him and I will look over his composition. When can he be here?"

"By the end of tonight's concert."

"Will you bring him here, then, at eleven o'clock?"

Billy said he would, and the men arose.

"This," said Biddle, "will be managed by telegraph. Now we will give out the impression that your music was left in New York, and that it has been sent for."

"Oh, dear!" laughed the prima, "who would have thought that so much craft lurked in Boxford?"

She shook hands with them both, and to Billy she said, "Whatever comes of this, Mr. Jameson, I am

obliged to you for your kindness. It has been very good of you to try to help me in this annoying difficulty."

At the very moment they were departing a bell boy came with Mr. Alexander's card, and Elise was required again to get out the costume that had been condemned to remain invisible to Boxford. Madame had changed her mind, which Madame had an undeniable right to do.

"Say!" exclaimed Billy, gripping Biddle by the arm, as they walked down stairs, that process being considerably speedier than transit by elevator. "Say! but isn't she a stunner! Eh? Isn't she, now?"

"Yes," replied Biddle, diplomatically; "I should say so."

"Bosh! Where's your enthusiasm—all gone into advance press notices? Huh! You haven't boomed her half enough, I'm sure of it. Oh, there's one paper I could mention that will speak well of Guarda, especially if she does Ordway's aria. She's got me. She can put her shoes in my trunk. I'm clean gone. Come and have something."

Billy was dragging Biddle toward the barroom, a place that discreet gentleman would have entered only if bent on social suicide.

"No, thank you," said he; "I must keep my breath pure for the inevitable struggles with other vocalists later in the day."

"Try a clove," suggested Billy. "No? Well, I admit that it's about as clear a give-away as rum. Sorry for

you, but you'll excuse me? Make me out a list of adjectives that you'd like to have applied to La Guarda and I'll run them in my reports every night. If you find that music before the last train comes in from New York, you must let me know."

Biddle promised to do so and departed, glowing with gratitude to the reporter. Billy went to the barroom alone. He hastened his drink that he might go to the telegraph office and send a dispatch to Ordway.

"Take next train for Boxford," he wired; "bring Italian air, full score and parts. Will meet you."

"That will bring him," Billy reflected, "and with him will come the real struggle. If he should get into one of his high-and-mighty, obstinate fits, there'll be no doing anything with him. Confound him! He must consent. I'll make it a personal matter. He's got to do it for me. If Guarda shouldn't fancy his piece—but she's got to! I wish he was here now."

The complex operation in wiliness renewed Billy's thirst, and after the telegram had been sent he returned to the barroom.

IV.

If on my theme I rightly think,
There are five reasons why men drink:
Good wine, a friend, because I'm dry;
Or lest I should be bye-and-bye,
Or any other reason why.

—John Sirmond.

Ordway was more than amazed by Billy's telegram. That his friend had gone to the Boxford festival he knew, and he had been greatly tempted to go with him; for, aside from the music to be heard there, Boxford was not many miles from East Wilton, where Mrs. Ordway still lived; but the musician could not afford the luxury of a visit home at this time. Music, as a vocation, in New York, had not been as generously lucrative as Billy had prophesied. For reasons that not even the keen reporter could grasp fully, the city had failed to recognize that a genius of the first rank had condescended to reside in town. It may be that if Billy had lived longer he might have discovered that even if the city had recognized the genius within its walls it would have condemned him to starvation.

Not that Ordway had suffered unduly. Who, with an eye single to art, embarks unknown upon a career in a

great city deserves privation. Dispute the proposition with kindly sentiment, if you will; privation will be his share, whatever your estimate of his deserts. It has been intimated that opinions might differ as to Ordway's genius. That is ever the rule, and the chronicler of some portion of Ordway's career does not arrogate to himself the high authority to fix his just place in the ranks of contemporary composers. Let it be sufficient that up to this time, when the Boxford Festival was on, there were at least two persons who believed in him. One was Billy Jameson, and the other was Herbert Ordway. The first believed unreservedly; the second with certain clinging distrust and apprehension.

The first effect of the telegram was to send Ordway to his closet, from whence he took the composition referred to. He sat down with the orchestral score in front of him and silently read it through. It appealed to him as when first he sketched it, more than three years before. The winning charm of its melodies was strong upon him, his blood chilled as he felt its exquisite modulations. To him it seemed impossible that such music should not meet with instant approval—and that seemed a cold way of putting it. Approval? Of course! Any musician could perceive that it was well done as a matter of workmanship; but that which is dearer to the creative spirit than details of construction, the emotional content, that which proceeds from gift rather than from attainment—was not that there in such abundance that listeners could not but be moved, exalted, carried

with the composer to his own heights of prophetic vision?

Thus he felt as he rebelled against any possible criticism, for this, as it stood, was what he wanted. Lapse of time had not diminished its force. It was now, as it had been from the beginning, a spontaneous song of his soul, an expression of his highest self, complete within the limitations of its form.

Again he felt the bitter sting of that first attempt to set its beauties forth for the appreciation of another. Barbara had not understood it! How could any human being fail to be stirred by it even under imperfect interpretation? The experience had had its value. Never again would he take such risks. Never would he attempt to arouse in others the impressions that were clear to him in his imagination, without those resources that are designed to serve as the manifestations of imagination, that is, a perfect voice and complete orchestra.

That oft-repeated resolution, which, in this instance, had been broken only, as Billy had said, by the fact that the reporter had entered unperceived on an occasion when the composer was running over the piece, brought his mind around to the telegram. Billy knew his crotchets. Could it be possible that he would send for him and the piece for anything but a performance? Hardly, but could it be further possible that that resourceful champion had actually managed to arrange for a performance at the Boxford Festival? It was all unthinkable, and yet, as Ordway packed his grip, his fancy

dwelt on performance, he dreamed of swinging a baton over the superb orchestra assembled for the Festival, he heard a really great voice and, yes, he heard the tumult of applause at the end.

It was half-past ten when he stepped from the train. At that moment the audience was leaving the Festival hall at the conclusion of the first concert, but there was Billy, come to the station to meet him. The reporter's open overcoat showed the splendor of his evening dress, and Ordway smiled, remembering suddenly an occasion when Billy had protested that he never "dressed" when his participation in a musical event was merely professional. Billy was trying to see six car platforms at once, and therefore he failed to see Ordway till the composer grasped his hand.

"Ah," said Billy, gravely, "I banked on you. I banked on her sense of humor. That did the business, that and a spice of respect for the power of the press. Bring the music?"

"Yes," replied Ordway, and his heart, that had been quivering with expectancy, was deathly dull and heavy. The lights in the station were not so dim that he had not perceived at first glance the unwholesome gleam in Billy's eyes. In these three years Ordway had learned to recognize that signal light. The noises of the station were not so strident that he failed to detect the painfully distinct enunciation that marked Billy's speech on this occasion. The confusion of many persons moving hither and yon was not great enough to interfere with

Billy's rigidly steady gait. All these were manifestations of something that was regretted by more than Billy's most intimate friend.

"Come on, then," said Billy; "I have a cab waiting for us."

Another evidence of the same. That was Billy's way when he was not himself. He once rode through Central Park at four o'clock A. M., the sole, pompous occupant of a carriage to which, at his solemn insistence, four horses had been harnessed. Poor Billy! what fun, forgotten next day, you thought you were getting out of life at sundry times!

So, then, thought Ordway, this sensational trip to Boxford was to be attributed to a freak of disordered fancy! That was disappointing, regrettable, but unhappiness on that score vanished speedily before the greater misfortune—that Billy should have allowed himself to get into this condition. They had not gone half way across the station before Ordway rejoiced in a grieving way that he had come to Boxford. He could take care of Billy. On at least one previous occasion he had saved Billy from disgrace by writing a report for him that passed muster with the night city editor. This would be a simple matter now, with familiar music to chronicle in a brief telegram.

"Billy," said Ordway, when they were in the cab, "have you sent your dispatch?"

"Ten minutes before your train came," replied the reporter, promptly. "Wrote it in advance this after-

noon, held it till the concert was almost over, and filed it on the way to the train."

Ordway sat back with a sigh of relief.

"What am I here for?" he asked.

"Opportunity of your life," said Billy. "Sense of humor did it. Few women have it to such a marked degree." Billy's adamantine gravity yielded suddenly to a series of extravagant chuckles. He went on speaking, his enunciation failing him somewhat: "Puzzled public, smiling singer, carping critics captivated! Oh! it's so damn funny it's a pity I can't write it up. Applause lavished on supposed foreigner calmly taken by Bert Ordway incog. Never was such a joke, and she sees it. Tickles her. Bert, old fellow, it's the op—op—pop'tu-n'ty of your life!"

"I don't see it yet," said Ordway, perceiving the faint trail of an idea in Billy's maundering. "What's the joke? Or, first, who is she?"

"Guarda, your Miss Julia Ward, you know." Billy was grave again, his utterance slow and distinct. "She lost her aria, an Italian thing made to her measure. Doesn't want to substitute an old thing, and your piece can go on in place of it."

"She lost her aria? How could that happen?"

"If she knew, don't you s'pose she'd find it?"

The cab stopped at the hotel entrance.

"We'll go to your room to talk it over, I suppose?" said Ordway.

"Yes, a few minutes," replied Billy. "She'll be waiting for you inside half an hour."

He would have given his driver double fare if Ordway had not interposed. They left cabby muttering soft but whole-souled imprecations on strangers afflicted with sobriety, and went to Billy's room.

"Now," said Ordway, assuming a sharp, aggressive tone, "let me understand this. What I have gathered of your notion so far is preposterous. To begin with, has Guarda lost any music?"

For reply, Billy took his programme book from his overcoat and passed it to Ordway, pointing to an item in the bill for the miscellaneous concert.

"That's it," said he. "Thought she was going to rehearse it this morning. The thing disappeared somehow and can't be found. Prima and committee in a state of funk and panic. I had a luminous idea; Biddle said so. He's got sense of humor, too. That's the whole story, Bert; joke on the public and opportunity for you."

All that was so clear to fuddled Billy was incomprehensible, incredible, to Ordway. For a full minute he stood, scowling at the programme. Unable to see how he could get deeper into the matter, he asked, "Who's Biddle?"

"Chairman programme committee," replied Billy.

"He knows about this plan, does he?"

"Yes, but he's the only one except Guarda. Thing's got to be profound secret."

"Do you mean to say that this——" he hesitated between humbug and deceit, and finally used neither word, continuing, "has the sanction not only of the prima donna, but of the programme committee?"

"Yes," answered Billy. "Biddle's the committee. Public won't know the difference——"

"And you would have my piece done under another man's name?"

"Certainly. Where's your sense of——"

Ordway took his friend by the shoulders.

"Billy," said he sadly, "if you weren't—if you were yourself I should be deeply offended."

Now, there was one point upon which Billy was keenly sensitive. Drunk, or sober, he resented any reflection upon his drinking habit. They had once come to the verge of a quarrel, these two, when Ordway sought to reason with him. Billy was sober then, and he gave his friend clearly to understand that he would go his own gait, and that the surest way to make things worse was to preach about them. And Ordway never had preached since. He valued the friendship too highly to risk losing it.

At this time, Billy manifested his resentment, for he was not so far gone that he could not perceive Ordway's meaning, by rising, squaring his shoulders, and remarking stiffly:

"Then you can take offense now, for I planned this all before I had taken a drink this morning. And for that

matter, I never was more sober than I am at this minute."

Ordway shut his teeth together to repress the ironical retort that sprang to his lips.

"And I'll prove it," added Billy, aggressively, "by ordering up a drink now."

He started across the room to press the button.

Ordway leaped in front of him and caught his hand before it touched the wall.

"Damned if you do, Billy!" said he. "Understand me, old fellow, if you take another drink tonight I shall start back to New York, on foot if necessary."

Billy was too astonished at this forcible interruption to retort or rebel for an instant. Ordway held him firmly, and they breathed in one another's faces. The unwholesome glow in Billy's eyes became a dangerous flash.

"Well, by——" he began, wrenching away his wrist and then there was a knock at the door.

Both young men were startled. Ordway paled. Billy's lips parted weakly and his knees shook. He grasped the foot board of the bed for support. Even he perceived dully that there was incipient tragedy in this break with his best loved friend.

"I'll go," said Ordway, in a whisper.

A tall, very thin man, with white moustache, immaculate evening dress and military bearing, stood in the corridor.

"La Guarda," said he, stiffly, "send her compliments

to M'sieur Zhammson and beg to ask for M'sieur Ord-a-way. Has ze m'sieur came?"

"Yes," replied the party asked for; "Mr. Ordway is here."

"La Guarda ask to see heem at hees—hees soonest convenience, m'sieur."

"Very well, in one moment."

The tall man bowed punctiliously and departed. Ordway closed the door. This, then, solved all doubts. The scheme was no figment of drunken fancy. It was real, and the incomparable Guarda, Julia Ward, the heroine of his early musical days, was waiting to see him.

Billy had forgotten the proposed drink and the quarrel.

"I told you," said he, triumphantly. "All arranged. Sense of humor did it. We'll go to her parlor right away."

"No," said Ordway.

"No?" and Billy looked distressed. "Bert! For my sake! Come, I know better than you that it's an opportunity. Don't kick over everything I've tried to do for you."

"Listen, Billy! I'll go, alone. Is that clear?"

Billy tried to grasp it. "Alone?" he echoed wonderingly.

"Yes. It seems you've made an appointment for me, and I will keep it. What's the number of her room?"

"Ten. But, Bert, why alone?"

Ordway would not tell him.

"It's alone, or not at all, Billy," he said, firmly.

"All right," grumbled Billy, "alone it is. Don't forget your music."

Ordway was going to the door, leaving his bag where he had dropped it.

"I don't mean to take my music," he said.

"What!" and Billy was so overcome with surprise and disappointment that he sat down on the bed and stared.

A great wave of warm feeling rushed over the musician. He strode back to the bed and grasped Billy by the hand.

"Billy," said he, pleadingly, "stay here, will you, till I come back? For God's sake, Billy, don't leave the room."

"Go on," responded Billy, pushing his friend away.
"Don't make me out a fool."

V.

The applause of a single human being is of great consequence. —Samuel Johnson.

Ordway knocked at the door of number ten. A cheerful "Come in" was spoken upon the other side, and he opened.

Guarda stood by the pianoforte, a brilliant, enchanting figure in the regal glory of evening toilet. She had not had an appearance in the oratorio of the evening—that is, not in the technical sense. As a matter of fact, she had sat in a box where all could and did see. Her name was not blazoned in gilded letters along the front, as is the fashion with certain other musical instruments in public events; but everybody knew who she was, and everybody stared and thought of the morrow when she was to open her melodious throat for the first time in Boxford. The estimable person who did her best to interest the audience in the soprano airs of the oratorio was so bitterly conscious of the attention paid to the famous singer that she sang sharp.

At that first glimpse of Guarda in her parlor, Ordway's memory reverted to "Faust." He remembered her appearance as Siebel, and a sudden embarrassment

seized him. To his almost complete discomfiture he knew that he was blushing. If it had been incumbent upon him to begin the conversation they would have had a meeting à la Quaker.

"Mr. Ordway?" said the prima, inquiringly.

"Yes," said he, feeling most uncomfortably that he was rooted to the corridor, and wishing devoutly that Billy had kept sober.

"I am glad to see you," and she advanced, smiling, with outstretched hand. "Mr. Jameson spoke in such glowing terms about you. I wonder if you appreciate what a friend you have in him? I expected him, too. Is he too busy to come?"

Ordway was within the room and the door was closed. His self-possession had returned, incited to its sway, first, by the business that had brought him there; and, second, by an ingenuous feeling of loyalty to Billy. He was no expert in fiction, as Billy was, but she had prepared the way for an explanation of the reporter's absence.

"Yes," he said; "this is the hour when newspaper men are busiest."

"I should have remembered it," said Guarda.

"He hopes to be excused this evening——"

"To be sure! But tell him I am most regretful—sincerely so, Mr. Ordway. He is such a charming fellow; don't you think so?"

"Indeed I do."

"Tell him to call to-morrow, will you? And now for

our business. I am sure it is very kind of you to come all the way from New York to help me."

She laughed—that girlish, ingenuous laugh that made committeemen dizzy and even soothed the raging breasts of conductors. Ordway thought he never had heard anything quite so delightful. It occurred to him, then, that there had been a grateful, cordial warmth in the brief touch of her hand in greeting.

It came over him uncomfortably that he was about to do a most ungracious thing. Her words implied that she wanted his assistance. Billy had babbled foolishly about her sense of humor. Oh! why had not that over-zealous friend put the situation to him in its real light? Had Billy persuaded Guarda that the young composer could be counted on to sacrifice his dignity for the sake of a woman in distress? And, if so, how much was it incumbent upon him in loyalty to bolster up Billy's lie?

He suffered momentary confusion, not from the least wavering in his resolution as to his ultimate conduct in the matter, but from doubt as to just what was the best way to proceed with due consideration for the feelings both of Guarda and his indiscreet friend.

"Am I to understand," he began, lamely, "that your aria is still missing?"

"Yes," she answered, and there was a glance at his empty hands, as if she had just perceived that he brought nothing with him. He caught his breath. It was singularly hard to say what he had meant to say courteously

but firmly. There was a slight, awkward pause, and again she helped him. Ah! how many a blundering wretch of masculinity has floundered successfully through a conversation because a clever woman led the way!

"I was terribly provoked," she said, "and am still greatly mystified, but far from inconsolable since Mr. Jameson told me about your aria. I would not have supposed that a piece of such merit could be had at short notice—that is, in America."

It was on the tip of Ordway's tongue to say frankly that the piece referred to could not be had at short or any other notice for her particular purpose; but there was an unintended sting in the tail of the remark that stimulated a retort.

"May there not be an American writer as well as an American singer?" he asked.

The question was put with courteous pleasantry, but the prima perceived the ring of personal pique in the tone. She played upon it.

"I hope so," she responded; "but in the town where I spent my childhood there was a homely saying about the proof of the pudding. You have heard it?"

"I have," he admitted, icily.

"And I have not heard your aria, Mr. Ordway. I never heard of it until to-day. Did you not bring it with you?"

"It is in the hotel."

"And not here!"

Who shall say whether Guarda at this juncture was the clever actress, or the piqued woman that seemed to be manifested in her mien, expression and tone?

Ordway felt horribly guilty. He blushed again consciously, and again it was on the tip of his tongue to convey his refusal to let his piece be used, when her manner changed as in a flash. She laughed merrily.

"Come!" she cried; "you are afraid to confess that you dare not trust your composition to me! You think I cannot sing it!"

"Oh! I assure you——"

"Don't deny it, Mr. Ordway." They had been standing through this, and here she tapped him coquettishly on the shoulder with her fan. "Don't deny it; but do reflect for one instant that I have not asked to sing it. I'm not at all sure that I want to."

"Well," said he, awkwardly, "that should settle it."

"Oh, how you try to evade the issue!" and she laughed again. "Mr. Jameson has interested me in the song—such a flatterer as he is! If he has flattered your music beyond its deserts as much as he did me, nobody will want your composition, Mr. Ordway. Oh! I assure you, Mr. Jameson's ready compliments betray him as a dangerous person. But I should like to see the piece, really."

He longed to show it to her; but he had had similar longings with other persons since that disappointing episode with Barbara, and these others he had resisted.

"Do you say this," he asked, seriously, "irrespective

of any design to use it in the extraordinary way proposed by my friend?"

That, at last, revealed his attitude clearly.

"Most certainly," said she.

"I am afraid you could make little of it—it's in manuscript, you know——"

Again that disconcerting laugh.

"You see! You are afraid of me!" she cried.

"Can you read?" he demanded.

"Music? What a question!"

"I have known singers who couldn't," he said, bluntly.

"Now, that's a challenge! Come, Mr. Ordway, run to your room and get your piece. If I cannot read it through correctly at sight, you shall scorn me and all the tribe of vocalists forever after; and if I do read it to your satisfaction, we shall be friends, shall we not, whatever happens? Come! your hand on that! It's a fair proposition, is it not?"

Could any man draw back when so lovely a hand was held toward him?—when beyond the hand were sparkling eyes that danced with good-humored raillery and personal interest that Guarda herself would have acknowledged to Elise, or anybody else? For this brusque, blushing, strange manner of man aroused her curiosity. He was the first she had met since her return to America who had not flattered her by word or look. But, more to the point, could any unheard

composer resist such an opportunity to hear a great voice in his favorite work?

It was a grim smile on Ordway's face as he clasped her hand, but it was a smile, and the challenge was accepted. He hurried to Billy's room. On the bed, just as he had left him, was Billy, his eyes fixed stolidly on the door.

"Well," said he, huskily.

"I'm going to let her look at it," said Ordway, beginning to open his grip.

"Let her look at it!" mumbled Billy, softly. Evidently he had a vague perception of the wisdom of stifling his scorn. "High and mighty to the last! Is there no divinity to shape the ends of an idiot?"

Ordway heard and chuckled. He felt in amazing good humor, even with his indiscreet friend.

"Hold your horses, Billy," he said. "Wait a little longer;" and, with the piano score in hand, he hurried back to Guarda.

"Now," cried she, as he took his seat at once before the instrument, "may I ever fail if I fail now!"

"You'll have to imagine the orchestration," he said; and, without further preliminary, began to play.

He had not turned a page before he wellnigh lost his fingers in astonishment and delight. Guarda could sing —ah, yes! let there be no misapprehension on that matter. The world may judge of her as a woman as it will, and certain things to be set down in this record may furnish guides to the verdict; but as to her singing,

as the printed page cannot be made to speak, much less to sing, it must be taken on the chronicler's authority, and he but voices the estimate of all who had the privilege of hearing her, that in her day and time none excelled Giulia Guarda. There was the voice that, when you and I have attained the comfortable, conceited, old fogey age, we will quote to the disparagement of all the younger generation of concert aspirants.

"Yes, my boy, pretty—but you should have heard Guarda! There was a singer!—a past mistress of the genuine bel canto, my boy! And a voice gifted with that divine attribute of sympathy that would have melted you to tears had she sung in Syriac! Ah, well! we shall never see or hear the like of Guarda again. I shall never forget when she sang in——" and so forth, doddering and blabbing to the end of the chapter.

Ordway caught his breath and played on. He forgot the fantastic conditions of the trial. After the first recitation it did not occur to him that the singer never had seen the music before. She read notes as one reads words; her phrasing displayed her the finished musician as well as the vocalist. She took instant grasp on the meaning of the text, and the wealth of feeling she infused into the poem exalted her to the plane of the composer's own imagination. It even seemed to him that he had builded better than he knew.

At the end she waited, like a true artist, for the brief postlude. Then she clapped her hands and began to dance around the room.

"Glorious! superb!" she cried. "Why, it is ever so much better than the piece I lost! It's great! Why, Mr. Ordway! how have you kept this concealed? Ah! ah!"

Words were far from expressive enough, and she caroled again the brilliant ending, with its high notes and trills.

Meantime Ordway sat with his hands motionless on the keyboard, and his head bowed.

Guarda drew a long breath as she finished again, and went close to him. He could feel the warmth of her body; the touch of her dress made him shiver.

"It is wonderfully beautiful," she said, in a low tone that vibrated. "Come, Mr. Ordway, is it friends?"

He looked up and saw that she was holding out her hand. There was the faintest trace of roguishness in her searching glance, just a reminiscence of their fantastic compact. Behind it was sincerity.

"Miss Ward," he said, as he took her hand, and, unconscious of his slip, he did not stammer an apology, "I think that friend is a weak word for it. I owe you a debt of gratitude I can never pay. You have made me happier than I ever was in my life."

His intense earnestness took her breath away.

"Why!" she gasped, a little startled it seemed, "I am very glad. You may be sure it is a delight to sing such music."

She withdrew her hand.

"You must let me have the piece," she went on. "I

admire it more than I can tell you. We will come to terms about it after the Festival——”

“Don’t speak of terms,” he interrupted, wincing at the commercial suggestion, and he did not need to present his feeling in greater detail, for she understood him.

“You will let me use it, won’t you?” she resumed, quickly. “It is a shame that you should have to go without credit, but we can make up for that later. The committee here is so sensitive about any change from the announcements, you know. Let the piece pass as the one on the programme. Afterwards, in New York, and all over the world, I will sing it as yours.”

“You may do with it what you will,” said Ordway, simply.

“Thank you, ever so much!”

“When will you rehearse with orchestra?”

“To-morrow at eleven.”

“It will be ready for you. Good-night!”

Did she wonder why he was so abrupt?

“Good-night,” she responded. “Will you leave the piano score?”

“Yes; though, God knows, you don’t seem to need any further study on it. You sang it as if you had—as if you had written it yourself.”

“Really,” she said, seriously, “that is the finest compliment I ever received.”

He was at the door, but he turned and said:

“I have a special pleasure in this matter, for you were

in the cast of the first opera I ever heard—‘Faust,’ some three years ago.”

“Were you indeed in the audience?” she exclaimed. “Then I don’t wonder you hesitated to let me sing the aria. Siebel was a part wholly unsuited to me. I had to take what I could get in those days, you know——”

“I have not heard it sung better since,” he interrupted, smiling gravely; “but you do not quite understand me. I had not distrust of your ability—— It doesn’t matter. Good-night.”

He was gone before she could respond.

VI.

I have observed that there are two topics that you may not discuss with your best friend: the indiscretions of his wife; and his drinking.

—The Hermit.

When Ordway was again in Billy's room, he knelt by his grip and began to take music paper from it. The reporter still sat on the bed, his fingers clutching the coverlet, his eyes staring painfully. He had kept his promise, and for that Ordway was thankful. Presently Ordway pressed the button on the wall.

"Going to have a drink, Bert?" asked Billy.

"No. I want pen and ink."

"What for?"

Ordway stood in front of his friend and spoke slowly: "Guarda will sing the aria. There is to be a rehearsal at eleven o'clock tomorrow. I've got to sit up all night to copy the parts."

"Copy the parts?" echoed Billy, comprehending dimly.

"Yes. As I never had occasion to use the piece, I didn't copy the parts for the band. It's got to be done now."

"All right. I'll help."

The composer looked thoughtfully at Billy. Had he "sobered up" in the interval since the arrival of the train from New York? If that were possible! If only he could help! There was a long, hard task ahead.

"Do you think you can write a clear musical hand, Billy?"

"Why not? Is it anything more than getting the notes down on the right lines and spaces?"

A boy called to see what was wanted, and Ordway gave directions: Several pens, ink, and a blotter. The materials were brought speedily. Meantime Ordway arranged the table so that two could work at it, and propped the orchestral score against the wall, and Billy had a momentary recurrence of characteristic ebullition.

"So she's going to sing it!" he exclaimed, as if the triumph of his scheme had dawned suddenly upon him. "The coming American composer permits the great prima donna to do his piece. Huh! Say, Bert, isn't she a stunner, eh?"

"Yes," said Ordway, absently. "I'll copy a second violin part, first, Billy, as that will have rather less added lines than most of the others. Then you can see what you can do in copying my copy. We can't both work from the score at the same time, you know, and there will have to be three copies for second violin."

He stopped to examine the programme book wherein the composition of the orchestra was set forth.

"Six second violins," he added; "yes, three parts for

them, four for the eight firsts—whew! We've got a job ahead of us, Billy."

"If it's nothing worse than long hours, I'm with you," said Billy. "Hustle, now."

Ordway hustled, and as he wrote, feeling the sounds of which the notes were the symbols, he heard again the exhilarating trial reading in Guarda's parlor. He thrilled again and again at the memory of it. Once, when he looked aside at the turning of a page, he saw Billy, as before, clutching the coverlet and staring painfully.

Presently a second violin part was ready.

"Now, Billy," said the composer, "I'll start this for you, as I don't want the heading to betray the authorship, and then you can go ahead. Remember that music is more exact than science; the slightest misplacing of a note will result in violent discord."

"Pope says 'all discord is but harmony not understood.'"

"Pope didn't know what he was talking about, Billy. Pope never wrestled with copyists."

Ordway had plunged into a first violin part. For some minutes he paid no attention to the reporter, for Billy either could make a useful copy, or he could not. In either case it would be a waste of precious minutes to try to oversee him. Two pens scratched away at the paper, one with rapidity and certainty, the other tentatively. At the turn of a page, Ordway looked around. He was just in time to catch Billy's head, which was falling forward to the table.

The reporter partly awaked when Ordway stood him up and began to help him out of his coat.

"It's all right, Billy," said the composer, in the kindest tone; "you've done your share. I'll manage the rest."

"I wan' show you one thing, Bert," and Billy made a tremendous effort to pull himself together. He pointed to the paper on which he had been at work. "Three sharps, see? Key of A. I know's much's that. Well, it's so much trouble t' keep putting sharps in at beginning of every line that I put 'em all in on firs' line, see? Za' all ri'?"

"First rate, Billy. Capital idea. It's an improvement in notation that ought to be adopted by everybody. Now lie down. It won't take me long to finish."

"I'd like t' do lot more, Bert. Lemme copy drum parts, eh? Got drum parts done?"

With this he collapsed for good. Ordway put him to bed. While he was moving a chair in the course of this operation, he saw two empty glasses that had been hidden behind it on the floor. Then he understood Billy's painful stare. Every nerve at command had been strained to keep awake.

"He kept his promise and staid here," thought Ordway, with a sigh, "but he ordered up drinks while I was with Guarda. Poor Billy!"

Before resuming his work he glanced with sad amusement at Billy's copy.

It certainly had its humorous aspect. I know, for it is before me as I write, the one souvenir, *manu propria*,

of Billy Jameson that has come into my possession. There is, first, the descriptive heading and mandatory direction in the composer's firm hand; then an attempt at the G-clef sign scratched out, followed by another attempt made wrong side to fore. After this, a handful of hieroglyphs that might be mistaken for sharps, with the time signature, 3—4, misplaced in the middle of them and carried by carets and leading line, after the manner of copy editing, to its place next the clef. Some extraordinary marks, at least one of which is a blot, extend Billy's effort as far as the entrance of the voice. Ordway, in his own copy, had written in the first words of the recitation as a cue to the violinist. When Billy tried to copy them, his few remaining thoughts wandered to their own fields of fuddlement, and he capped the climax of his night's work with a scrawl that, under study, resolves itself into the words: "Sense of humor."

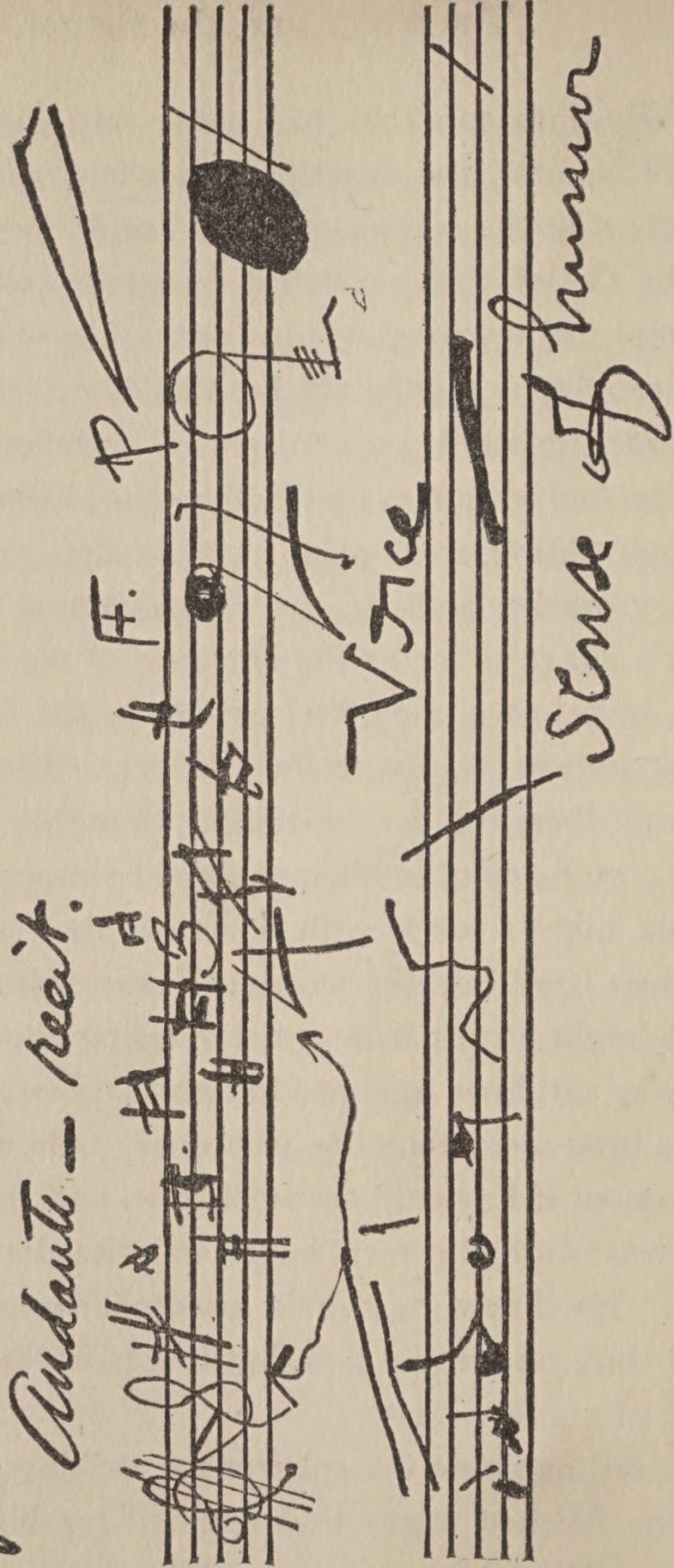
Midnight struck from a neighboring church tower as Ordway sat down again to his work. Eleven hours left, and a little more than one part done. He wondered for a moment if he could accomplish it, and then, in a way that was wholly his own, began to write slowly and carefully. He knew he would accomplish it. Later his hand took on a rapid gait, but it was not under the impulse of nervous haste.

He did not note the subsequent striking of the clock. It was finished pages that counted for him, not mere hours. The night wore on, Billy slumbered, and the sheets on the floor beside the composer increased steadily.

Arria

M 260

Andante - recit.



ily in number. Once he was dimly aware that a late comer was fumbling at the lock of a door near by. Once he got up and walked across the room, stretching his arms above his head. His back ached.

The time came when there were periodical visits of a person to the corridor who knocked at one door or another.

"Half past five, sir. Half past five."

"Six o'clock, sir. Six o'clock."

"Half past six, sir, half past six—half past six"—fainter and fainter—"half past six"—the voice was almost inaudible around a bend in the corridor. What a popular time for rising half past six seemed to be!

It was about then that Ordway thanked goodness that the manner in which he had scored his piece gave some instruments long periods of silence. A dash of the pen, with a figure above, and lo! ten, fifteen, forty measures had been written.

Necessarily the music sang itself to him as he put down the notes all night long and far into the morning. The transcription of an inner part suggested the melodic outline and the complete harmony. He heard it all, in full and in detail. It never tired him. Physical fatigue is one thing; exaltation of spirit based upon belief in one's own music is quite another, and dissipates it.

Along toward nine o'clock Billy awoke. He looked at his friend in a perplexed way for a moment.

"Hello, Bert!" said he.

"Good morning, Billy," responded Ordway, without raising his eyes from his work.

Billy sat up and crawled to the edge of the bed. He leaned far out so as to look over Ordway's shoulder and see what he was doing. There was a momentary flash of intelligence upon his face, followed by an expression of profound despair. He tried to shake off this uncomfortable companion of returning sense.

"I say, Bert," he asked with forced jocularity, "is it to-day, or some time next week?"

"Depends on the point of view, Billy."

"You've been at work all night."

Billy turned toward the window where the morning sun made a broad, bright splash of cheerfulness. He shuddered and leaned his head on his hands.

"Yes," and Ordway went composedly on with his notes and rests.

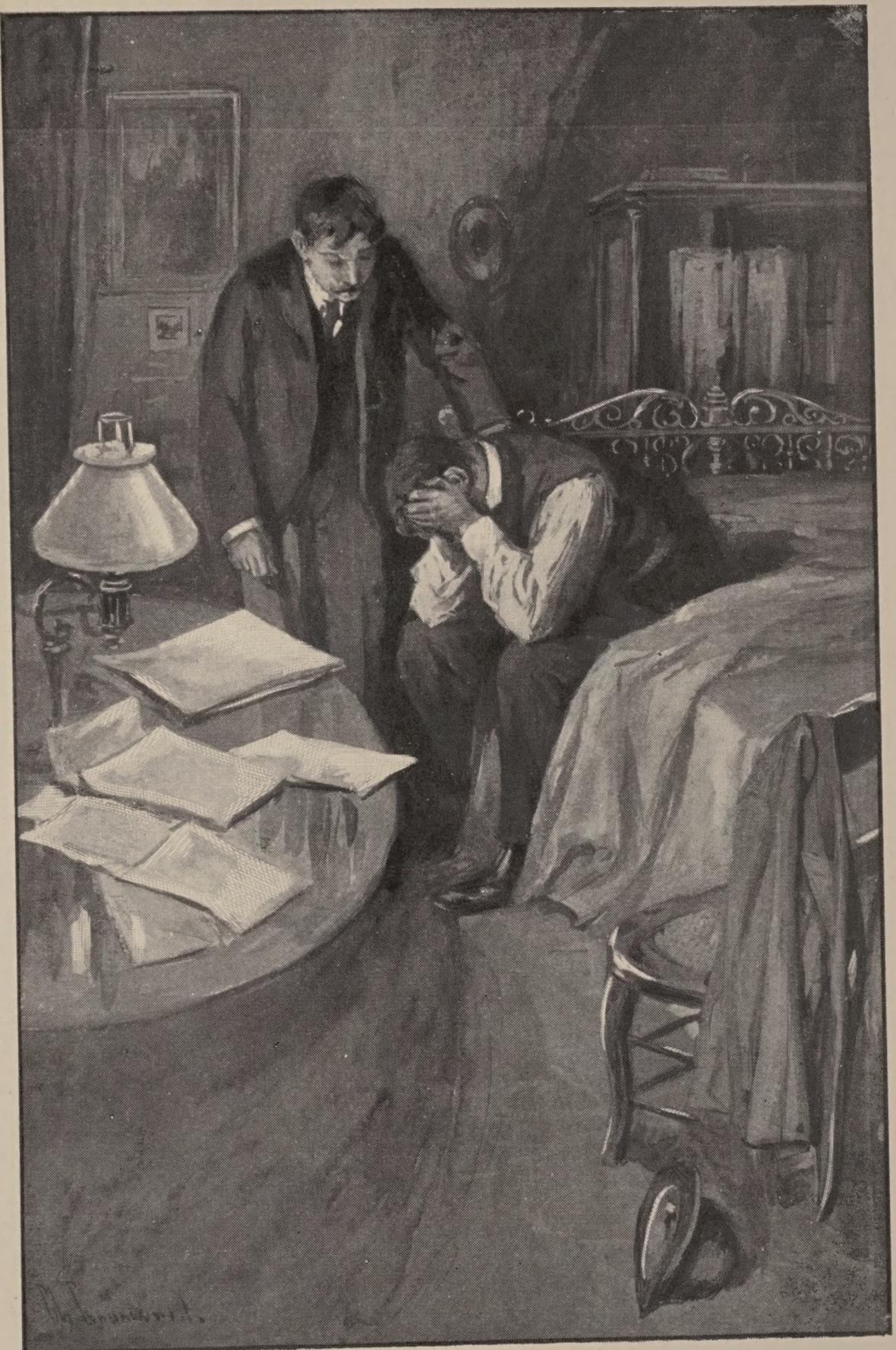
After a moment: "I believe," said Billy, "that I set out to help you, old fellow."

There was dismal self-reproach in his tone; it had in it, too, a despairing appeal, a waning shadow of hope that his friend could say something calculated to raise his self-respect from this dreadful slough.

"You did your little best, Billy," said Ordway. "It's all right. Don't worry about it."

"My little best! Huh! I suppose it didn't amount to very much as a lift for you, eh?"

"Would you like to see for yourself?"



"Don't sentimentalize over me," he said, between resentment and a groan.
See page 113.

Ordway paused long enough to hand Billy's attempt at a part to him.

The reporter's face took on instantly an expression of abysmal shame. Then was renewed for a moment the struggle between remorse and pride, pride at this time stalking impudently under the mask of "a sense of humor."

"Well, Bert," chuckled Billy, hoarsely, "I got some of those sharps in the right place, anyway."

The sheet of music paper fell to the floor, and Billy's head dropped upon his hands. He chuckled again, strangely it seemed to Ordway, who looked up.

He saw tears falling between Billy's fingers to the carpet.

The pen spread a long blot on the horn part then under consideration, and Ordway was on the bed beside his friend. He put his hand on Billy's shoulder.

"Never mind, old man," he said; "you needn't think of me. The work's most done, and through your efforts I have had not only a delightful experience, but, as you said, an opportunity——"

Billy interrupted by pushing Ordway away.

"Don't sentimentalize over me," he said, between resentment and a groan. "I'm a damned, drunken good-for-nothing, and I know it well enough."

Ordway stood up, pained, acutely pained.

"You're anything but a good-for-nothing, Billy," said he.

He sat again at the table, but he did not pick up his

pen, and Billy did not raise his head. A long minute followed in silence. Then said Ordway:

"I'm not going to sentimentalize, Billy, but I am going to preach, for you have given me the text, and, by the same token, you'll listen this time without getting angry."

Billy did not stir.

Who that has tried it knows that it takes moral courage of fine as well as strong fibre for a sensitive nature to lay down the law to a friend whose errors are those of weakness and good fellowship. The composer, whose indignant resolution had failed him before the charm of an unknown woman at a time when he was in the full strength of body and mind, now, when the body was at the quivering point of exhaustion, took his courage in hand and admonished his life-long friend. A weak man, a sentimentalist merely, would have let the occasion pass in grievous silence.

"Billy," said Ordway, gently, "for the first time you have applied that repulsive word 'drunken' to yourself. That's the text, and the sermon will be almost as short. You've got to get a strong grip on yourself, old fellow, for two reasons: your own sake and mine. You are interested in me and my career. You can help me. If you go to wreck before you establish me, I shall be, I won't say helpless, but handicapped. I need you, Billy. I want you to think of that."

"And one more thing: this, too, on the plain, practical side of things and not on the sentimental. Your drink-

ing has caused talk. It has made your editors uneasy. I met Fatty Miller a few weeks ago. I didn't introduce the subject, but he told me I ought to look after you. 'Make him take a tumble to himself,' said Fatty, 'for the time is past when a newspaper man can afford to get drunk. The standard,' said Fatty, 'is higher than it used to be. City editors nowadays won't tolerate the most brilliant writer who risks his assignment by getting a load on.' Fatty knew what he was talking about, Billy."

The sermon was finished. Billy sat up slowly. There was a hard, bitter look in his eyes that sent a new pang of apprehension to Ordway's heart.

"I won't say any more, old fellow," said the composer, turning mournfully to his work. "Go and have breakfast."

"Breakfast!" exclaimed Billy, and there was a suggestion of his own self in the retort. "Are you a human being to suggest food to me at this time?"

Ordway made no response, and Billy went with unsteady steps to the wall, where he pressed the button. In due course came a boy. Billy held the door open an inch.

"Bring me two brandy-and-sodas," said he; "two, understand! And at the same time a pot of hot coffee, some fruit and rolls. It's worth half a dollar to you to hustle."

The composer bent silently over his work. For a moment the notes of the horn part danced before him in a dismal blur. Then the transcription proceeded

swiftly, notes and rests, bar lines and accidentals, while Billy struggled into his clothes.

He was dressed when the boy returned with a heavily loaded tray.

"You've got to stop long enough for a cup of coffee, at least, Bert," said Billy, gruffly. "Don't be an unnecessary idiot. Put 'em there."

This latter was to the boy, who had deposited the soda bottles and the brandy on the bureau and was looking inquiringly for a place to set the coffee and eatables. Billy indicated a bare corner of the table where Ordway was at work. The things were set down and the boy withdrew, richer by half a dollar.

"I'm obliged to you, Billy," said Ordway, as he poured a cup of coffee.

The reporter did not answer. He was absorbed in drawing the cork from a soda bottle. A vigorous pop was followed by the clucking of the bottle as the liquids mingled. Billy drained the first long mixture without breathing. Without pause he opened the other bottle, but when he had emptied it and the brandy into the tall glass, he drank it much more slowly. Before it was finished, Ordway had placed the tray on the floor and gone to work again.

Then went Billy to the table and laid his hand on the composer's shoulder.

"Bert," said he, "that was medicine. You can't understand, but I had to have it. I give you my word I'll never drink another drop."

Ordway jumped up, to the peril of the ink pot. The aria, *Guarda*, the rehearsal, all were forgotten. He wrung Billy's hand hard.

"Thank God! Thank God! I believe you, Billy," was all he could say.

"There's a lady waiting for that," said the reporter, gulping and pointing to the incompletely horned part; "likewise a conductor, and the man with the crumpled horn, and a lot of palpitating committeemen. Get a move on, Bert."

The composer sat down again and fairly stabbed the notes into the requisite lines and spaces.

It was a long time, four weeks at least, before Billy broke that promise.

VII.

Friendship ! Mysterious cement of the soul !
Sweetener of life !

—Robert Blair.

It lacked half an hour of rehearsal time when Ordway laid a blotter on the last note of the tympani part, pressed it hard, and said explosively :

“There !”

“All done ?” asked Billy, who had made himself as useful as he could, by putting the copied parts in order, and now sat on the bed, waiting.

“All ready for the discovery of mistakes in the copying,” said the composer.

“But there won’t be any, will there ?”

“It would be a human impossibility to write so much without a slip of the pen somewhere. The errors will come out at rehearsal. Now, Billy, Guarda said last night that she wanted to see you. Suppose you deliver the score and parts to her while I get some fresh air.”

“I should think you’d want to sleep.”

“After the rehearsal. You don’t mind, do you ?”

“Mind !” shouted Billy ; “do you suppose I wouldn’t go through fire and death for a chance to talk with that

stunning person? I don't believe you have appreciated what a charming, unusual, captivating, altogether superlative dame it is, Bert."

"Perhaps not," said Ordway, drily. "Don't let her know I had to copy these parts during the night."

"You're such a man of one idea," continued Billy, getting the music in shape for carrying. "Head in the clouds, thinking in counterpoint, breathing harmony, smelling melodies, and all that, that you don't know when a live woman, lovely and lovable, speaks to you. But that's the way of genius. You're a sad case, Bert. If you should ever wake to find yourself a plain human being and fall in love, you'd break your neck with the shock of it."

"Quite likely, Billy. Don't tell her I sat up all night. I'll be at the hall in half an hour. Will they let me in without a pass?"

"Tell 'em you want to see me. They'll make you a present of the building."

Ordway went out and walked briskly. He was sensible of fatigue, yes, but never so wakeful. Presently he was to hear his work in all its completeness, and again that wonderful voice letting itself forth upon strains that, till now, had been his alone. From now on they would be another's also, for Guarda sang them from within their being, not as an ordinary singer who merely touches a work on its externals.

As he walked Billy's extravagant transports anent Guarda recurred to him, and with the memory a

strange, disquieting thought. Had Billy seriously fallen in love with her?

For a moment the honest composer could not say why that possibility gave him such deathly uneasiness. He was somewhat given to self-analysis, which perhaps was the wholesome balance to his artistic temperament, saving him from gaining too good an opinion of that genius his friend lauded so highly and persistently; and now, supersensitive from long toil over his own creation, his mind flew from one supposition to another. He asked himself if it were selfish reluctance to lose the hold he had upon Billy? If he dreaded the break in their relations? Or, was there such appreciation of Guarda aroused in himself that he feared for her on account of Billy's unfortunate habits? That was leaping so far ahead that he smiled incredulously.

If the right reason occurred to him, as perhaps it did, he dismissed it as equally incredible, for he had ever believed himself to be in love with Barbara Kendall. Indeed, in moments when time hung heavy, and Billy was not at hand to make the atmosphere sparkle, he had indulged in no little melancholy over what he chose to regard as his wrecked life. Wrecked, forsooth, because he loved a sweet girl out there in the country who had failed to appreciate him. Now and again he had worked himself into such bitterness about it that he had written tragic verses of the "Sturm und Drang" order, and set them to extraordinary music that nobody but himself cared for.

Ah, well! Herbert Ordway, in those days, really did know a great deal of music, but there were some ordinary matters in human life of which his ignorance was vast.

The upshot of his thought was that if Billy had fallen in love with Guarda it ought to be the best thing possible for him. Sentiment of that kind, once powerfully aroused, might effect a permanent change in his habits. If only Guarda would have the good sense to do her part in the possible compact and love Billy! How could she help it? Ordway was glad he had sent Billy with the music, so that, if the supposition were correct, the incipient flame of love might be fostered by the meeting of the two.

It is thus that a whole-souled, overwrought dreamer dreams his dreams into the misty future.

Billy, with an impetuosity that should not surprise anybody who has made his acquaintance, knocked at Guarda's parlor door without the formality of sending up his card. Elise opened, but the prima herself was in view, for she sat at the pianoforte, running over Ordway's aria.

"Mr. Ordway's compliments and the score and parts," said Billy.

"Oh!" and Guarda came running to the door. "Where is Mr. Ordway? Come in, Mr. Jameson, good morning—Goodness!"

She burst into her fetching laughter, and Billy grinned sympathetically, but unknowing why.

"Am I ever to see you both together?" she cried.
"Really, I am coming to believe that you are one and
the same—which is Jekyll, and which is Hyde?"

"I'm Hyde, Miss Ward. Don't make any mistake
about that. Jekyll's gone for a walk, lest he fall asleep
during rehearsal."

"What do you mean?"

"He told me not to tell, but I'm going to, for I want
you to realize what a rare bird it is, don't you know?
I told you yesterday that he was a good fellow——"

"Hyde is a good fellow, too, isn't he?"

"And you're another! I beg your pardon." But
Guarda's laugh was rippling, and Billy went on, una-
bashed: "That is it; he had never offered his piece for
public performance, you understand, and so when this
occasion came the orchestral parts weren't ready.
They've all been copied since he was here last night."

Guarda's astonishment was patent and genuine
enough.

"I want you to understand all about it," continued
Billy. "He didn't want you to know how he had to
work for fear you'd feel under obligation to him. That's
Bert Ordway. He feels under infinite obligation to you.
He hasn't said much, for he doesn't gabble as I do, but
that's the fact. See? You mustn't let him know that I
told. It would make him sore against me, and I
couldn't stand that, but I want you to know."

"How long did it take him?" asked Guarda, look and
tone attesting her sincere interest.

"He finished the last note about five minutes ago."

"And had not slept at all?"

"Not a wink. Just kept his pen scratching away——"

"And Hyde helped him, of course."

There was plenty of color in Billy's eyes, and a plenteous lack of it on his cheeks to substantiate any fiction he might have indulged in on this matter.

"No," he said, bluntly, "Hyde went to bed." Then, driven to it by Guarda's quick glance of new astonishment, he added: "I tried to help him, but I made such a sorry mess of it that I had to stop, for I was hindering him. You see, the only notes I ever made before were to my tailor, and those I made last night would have been equally hard to meet satisfactorily."

"I was sure," she said, softly, "that you wouldn't deliberately leave such a friend in the lurch."

Then the vagrant color hastened to Billy's cheeks for an instant. His readiness of speech nearly failed him. A look of mute appeal, or something that seemed like it, flashed from his eyes to hers and made her wonder.

"It must be lovely," she said with a sigh, "to be such friends. I felt almost from the beginning of our talk yesterday that you were seizing an opportunity for a friend rather than acting out of any interest in me or the Festival. I liked you for it."

"Thank you," responded Billy, feeling a distressing mixture of elation and guilt from which his "sense of humor" hardly extricated him; for he began to look ahead to another discussion of this matter that must

come some time. There was a square parcel in his bureau that he would have no use for after the last concert. "I am proud to call Bert Ordway my friend," he added.

Then he wondered at the fleeting expression of sadness that darkened her features, and he felt that the situation was becoming just a bit embarrassing.

"I have no business to stand here babbling," said he. "This is your busy day, if ever you had one. Can I be of any service to you?"

"Yes," she responded brightly, "take the score and parts to the hall for me. I shall be perfectly sure that these won't be lost if they are in your hands, Mr. Jameson."

"Oh!" exclaimed Billy, retreating hastily, "your confidence in me is overwhelming."

Sense of humor was uppermost again, if you could judge from the smile that clung to his lips all the way to the hall, but there was also a happy satisfaction in that, as he believed he had done a good thing for his friend by telling Guarda so much about him.

VIII.

If music be the food of love, play on.

—Shakespeare.

“Aria!” called the conductor, as he wiped his brow after a struggle with the “Ride of the Valkyries.”

The rehearsal was more than half done, and Guarda had just entered the hall. A few more persons were present than had been there the day before, for word had sped from committeemen that the prima had sent to New York for her missing music, and that it had arrived. Ordway stood at the very back of the hall. Billy was near, whispering to Biddle.

Guarda mounted the steps to the platform and beamed upon the orchestra. Ordway held his breath; he noticed that her hands were empty. What had she done with the pianoforte arrangement?

The conductor opened the orchestral score, and then leaned toward the singer to get suggestions from her as to the tempo. She beat a bar with her fingers, and he raised the baton.

Ah! the exhilarating coolness that swept over the composer as the physical sense perceived at last what had lain so long in his imagination! Those were his

harmonies, his conceptions of tone color—and there was the most thrilling voice in the world giving expression to his melodies! And Guarda was singing from memory!

Billy noticed this astonishing fact and edged up to Ordway.

"It's yours, isn't it?" he whispered, apprehensively.

Ordway nodded. His lips were pressed together. He was trying not to betray his special interest in the piece, and he felt as if all eyes were fixed suspiciously upon him. Billy marveled.

"Bert copied the parts by an all-night job," he said to himself, "and she did her share by memorizing it. She certainly is a stunner, and how like the mischief she can sing!"

Some of the committeemen exchanged nods of satisfaction; others were content to gape, spellbound, at the singer. If they had been brought to the trying ordeal of expressing verbally what they felt, it is most unlikely that their emotions would have found vent in anything more profoundly eloquent than "Golly!" To them was no consideration of the subject matter. If you had called their attention to the music as such, they might have acknowledged sub-consciousness of its existence, but they would not have been able to say anything about it. It was Guarda they heard. Really, what a deal of nerve energy had been thrown to waste in regretting the loss of one piece and in devising a way to substitute another! As if the mere music counted!

There was once a man who declared with all the positiveness of deep conviction that an excellent salad could be made of excelsior, so be you had the right kind of oil.

The piece was played and sung through without an interruption. In that few minutes there was to Ordway the revelation of a lifetime. It progressed by distinguishable stages from that first exhilaration consequent upon the testimony of his ears to the correctness of his imagination. Many a time had he reflected upon these effects, laboriously had he contrived them; and here they were, as straightforward and clear as if they had come without effort, spontaneously from the will of some spirit that might be supposed to unify the orchestra. There was an instant of boyish quaking of the heart as an absurd apprehension came over him lest those men up there should lay down their instruments and protest that this should not be thus and so; and then, as they played on, came the second stage—an exultant self-justification. The music was not only beautiful, it was right, it was what he had believed it to be.

It was after this that the voice of the singer appealed to him more as an individual factor than when he regarded it merely as an element in his composition. He felt, even more than he had at the trial reading, that warmth of emotion for which Guarda's voice was distinguished. Her method he thought of not at all. That it lay behind the effect she produced did not occur to him. What he did perceive was the fact that she

read into the music meanings deeper than he had imagined; it was as if his own soul had suddenly been purified, lifted to heights greater than he had known before, and as if it were now calling back to him to rise and follow. A duality of impressions that bewildered for a moment and then resolved itself into one clear, unmistakable fact—a oneness of soul between the singer and the maker of what she sang. It was his music, and hers; to him she was speaking through the mediumship of his own serenest, loftiest thought. She felt what he did, the same emotion, the same transcendent delight in the art, the same perception of the poem, the same conviction that here, in this piece, was completeness of expression. Therefore, singer and composer having been brought by the music to oneness of soul—but Ordway constructed no syllogism. There was no therefore in his consciousness. All there, as he felt the vocalist singing to him, was worship, palpitating worship, and the subject of it was Giulia Guarda.

He did not call it love; he did not think of it in analytical detail as the music sped on to the brilliant finale; he was aware merely that a spell of greater force and significance than ever he had dreamed of had been cast over him.

And there were false notes in the band. He shivered as they cut across his ears, and yet he marveled how triumphantly the song soared on, Guarda all unshaken by this or that discord held stridently against her voice by some blundering instrumentalist, or by some other who

was playing faithfully the errors in his copy. Ordway's teeth were on edge with distress at the end, while yet his breast was surcharged with adoration.

"A-a-a-a-a-h!" said the committeemen. Biddle clapped his hands noisily and others joined in. Billy smiled and smiled. Guarda coquettishly acknowledged the hand-claps, that sounded so meagre and thin in the vast emptiness of the place, and the conductor turned back several pages to try over a passage. It was one in which false notes abounded. The discords were quite as apparent as before.

"Billy," whispered Ordway, "I've got to straighten that out even if I give the whole thing away."

His face was alternately red and white, as he walked rapidly down the centre aisle to the platform.

"Can't you leave it to the conductor, Bert?" urged Billy, tagging close behind, and in a panic lest the composer should say something impolitic. Composers, big and little, have been given to that sort of thing since the history of music began.

Ordway did not reply. Guarda, observing their approach, concealed her emotion, whatever it was, behind a beatific smile.

The conductor was puzzling over the score and some band parts that he had asked the men to pass up.

"I beg your pardon," said Ordway, to attract his attention.

The conductor turned inquiringly.

Guarda interposed. "This gentleman," said she, "is

an intimate friend of the composer and knows the work thoroughly. He can clear up any doubtful point."

"That's lucky," said the conductor; "there are some odd effects here, apparently——"

"The trouble is in the horns."

The horn parts were handed to Ordway. He found a note that had been changed in pencil by the player.

"What does he mean by changing that note?" demanded Ordway, indicating the place.

The conductor conveyed the inquiry to the player and reported:

"He supposed that the phrase must have been intended to be the same as the one that occurs previously in his part. He thought the copyist had made a mistake."

"Tell him," said Ordway, sharply, "to play the part as written and think less."

Guarda had sudden occasion to press her handkerchief to her lips, but her hand was down again in a moment, and the full force of her smile was turned on the conductor, who gave the necessary instructions. Then Ordway, quite as if he had a right to do so, demanded the repetition of other phrases. Discord resulted, and in two instances he discovered slips of the pen in the parts he had copied. Corrections made, he turned about abruptly and went back to his former position. The conductor looked curiously at the first page of the score. At the right of the title, where the composer's name

might be looked for, was evidence that something written there had been scratched out.

"Who—" the conductor began, when Guarda interrupted with a question about the next number to be rehearsed, and the conductor, too heavily burdened to bear non-essentials in mind, gave his attention to business and forgot the inquiry he had started to make.

All through this little episode, Ordway's features had been set in hard, unyielding lines. It was his heroic effort to accomplish two things—his share in the deceit concerning the authorship of the piece, and concealment of the overwhelming sentiment that had possessed him relative to Guarda. At the end of the rehearsal his expression was the same when Guarda approached him. She had been talking with Biddle and Billy. An earnest conversation it was, apparently, in the course of which the prima shook her head several times. Presently she went over to Ordway and shook hands with him.

"Are you satisfied?" she asked. "I mean, with the way I do it?"

"Perfectly," he answered.

"That's a strong word," said she; "but it sounds so polite."

"And therefore insincere? Miss Ward, if I should tell you all I feel there would be a sensation that might be disastrous to the Festival."

This was not putting his feeling into plain words, but perhaps the woman perceived what lay back of the utterance, for her eyes flashed.

"Then I wouldn't say it!" she exclaimed. "Have mercy on the Festival, do!" Then her manner changed. Raillery gave way to earnestness. "It was and is perfect torture to me," she said, "to withhold the credit you should have, but I think it is best for the present. Do you—"

"I am unreservedly content," said he, "with any course you may adopt. I hope you will understand that I appreciate as well as admire your feat in memorizing the piece."

"Ah!" and she laughed a little; "that was nothing. I didn't have to sit up all night to do it. I have more regard for my voice."

He looked at her sharply. Had Billy told? Nothing in her expression betrayed more than a chance shot.

"I shall expect you to lead the applause," said she, "just as generously as if the Italian whose name is on the programme had written it."

In his characteristic way, he took the remark seriously.

"No," he said; "I shall have to leave that to Billy."

"Billy? Oh! you mean Mr. Jameson. How nice!"

"What is nice? I don't understand."

"Why, Billy, to be sure! Dear me! I almost wish you hadn't mentioned it. I am sure I shall forget myself some time and call him Billy to his face."

"I don't think he'd be offended."

Guarda laughed and turned away. His Haughtiness was standing solemnly near a door. She went to him, and they left the hall together.

Then Billy came up. He was depressed in manner, a result of his last night's spree, Ordway thought. Ordway, on the other hand, was highly elated. Now that Guarda was gone, he could not wholly repress his feelings.

"Come on, Billy," he said, taking the reporter's arm; "let's go somewhere where we can laugh and throw up our hats with safety."

It was rather out of the common that the reporter made no light response, and again Ordway attributed his demeanor to physical and nervous reaction.

"I hope," said Ordway, as they emerged upon the street, "that you understand how I appreciate your thoughtfulness in seizing this occasion for me. At first, I confess, I was opposed to the idea. But she sings so superbly, what else could I do? No matter. I'm committed to it, and I wouldn't give up the experience for the world."

"I hope it will be the making of you, Bert," said Billy, gloomily. "I think she'll do the right thing in time."

"You mean that she'll sing the piece as mine? Of course! She has said so."

At this moment, looking ahead, he saw Guarda and His Haughtiness on the way to the hotel.

"By the way," he added, "who is that long specimen with Guarda? He is the one who called at the door of your room last night to say that she was waiting for me."

"That," replied Billy, with bitter contempt in his tone, "is Mister Guarda."

"Mister Guarda?" echoed Ordway. Seldom quick in catching the drift of innuendo, often the butt for raillery because of his serious denseness to what men call humor, he did not grasp wholly the significance of his friend's reply; but his heart sank, heavy with apprehension. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"That he's her husband," said Billy. "Haven't you heard her called 'Madame'?"

There was a pause, but Billy did not perceive it, before Ordway responded:

"Yes; but I confess that it made no impression on me. I had an idea that she had Italianized her name as a matter of professional fashion, and that the title 'madame' was applied from much the same reason. I thought she was really Miss Ward. I've been addressing her as such."

"In private life," said Billy, "she is Signora Giuseppe Napoli. Biddle has been telling me."

"What does he say?"

"Money."

"But I thought she was getting the highest fees."

"So she is—now. Things were different awhile ago. I had the impression—read it somewhere—that she was a girl of independent means, and that she had taken up an artistic career because she had gift and ambition. She must have lost her fortune, I suppose, before she made financial success with her art. Anyhow, she tied

herself to that wreck. I don't see, while she was about it, why she didn't pick up a prince, or at least a count."

Ordway said nothing, and after a moment Billy went on:

"It does seem to me that the husband of a prima donna is about the most useless, utterly contemptible animal on the face of the earth! Think of being referred to as 'the husband of Miss Ward'! Huh! what do you think?"

Ordway laughed, and, so far as Billy could see, there was genuine merriment in his tone.

"Billy," said he, "there are more fools in the world than you could shake a stick at."

"That's an appropriate metaphor for a musician. I could point out a fool or two for you if you found your baton idle from want of business. But there's one thing you mustn't forget, Bert."

Billy suddenly became very earnest. It was seriousness now of another kind.

"She can be mighty useful to you, old man. This isn't the only song of yours she can sing. You and your piece have made a good impression on her. I'm pretty sure of that. Stick to her, Bert. Work her for all she's worth."

"Thanks," responded Ordway; "I'll bear it in mind. I'll try now to see if I can make up some of my lost sleep."

IX.

How cruelly sweet are the echoes that start
When memory plays an old tune on the heart!
—Eliza Cook.

Ordway did not attend either of the concerts of that day. In the afternoon he slept fitfully, and in the evening he went to East Wilton. Guarda sang in oratorio during his absence. He felt in all honesty that it behooved him to keep away from her magnetic presence and to break the spell that had been cast upon him.

"I am attending the Boxford Festival," he told his mother. "There is only one more concert that I care to hear. I am very tired, and do not want to see anybody."

That was on his arrival home late in the evening. Next morning, immediately after breakfast, he returned to Boxford.

"I am feeling rested," he said then, "and really ought to hear as much as possible. I must take in the morning rehearsal."

Guarda had nothing to rehearse, and she had no appearance in the afternoon concert. Accident favored him to the end that he did not see her until she went to the platform in the evening to sing his aria.

The last seat in the hall was taken, and there was a fringe of men around the walls. It was a gala occasion for Boxford. Every inhabitant who had one put on his swallow-tailed coat, and there were some who carried crush hats. The women—but how shall a mere man say anything more than that the women wore clothes? A good many of them—the clothes, I mean—were cut so as to display necks and shoulders to advantage, and altogether the audience made a decidedly cheerful spectacle.

In recognition of his vocation, two seats in the best part of the floor had been assigned to Billy. Ordway, of course, occupied one of them. They went down to their places when they saw the conductor mounting the platform steps. The overture served its purpose of distracting attention from late comers, and putting everybody into an expectant frame of mind, and the faithful applauded it. God bless the faithful!

The world at large has never seemed to appreciate the debt it owes to the writers of overtures. Few persons ever hear them, and yet it takes a deal of time and some talent to write one. There once was a composer (he still is, according to last accounts) who took careful observations at many performances to find out how long it required for an audience to get settled. An average of his reckonings came to just three minutes and a half, and nothing could ever persuade him to write an overture longer than that by so little as one measure.

Herr Poppenmann-Humperfeldt was the first vocalist

of the evening. He sang something with a high B-flat in it, which ninety-nine in a hundred declared was high C, and won an encore. I believe the papers said it was a "rapturous" encore. Doubtless! It certainly was not an "ovation," for that word, of course, was reserved for Guarda. Herr Thingumbob, if I mistake not, received "salvos of applause," the prima contralto aroused a "furore," and the twitterings of the orchestra in numbers between got away with plain "enthusiasm." Thus six numbers of the programme were delivered successfully over to history, and then, the last before the intermission, came Guarda.

Ordway had been trying studiously to enjoy the concert thus far. He followed the orchestration with analytical ear, he observed the structure of pieces that were new to him, and he knew that it was really an excellent concert; but he was not stirred by it. On the contrary, he grew colder as the evening advanced. It was in vain that he berated himself silently for making so much to-do in his own bosom over the performance of something that happened to be his creation; the trouble lay not there. It was a personal relationship that weighed upon him now.

There was a long pause before Guarda condescended to issue from the greenroom. Ordway noticed that it was not her husband, but the conductor, who escorted her. Radiant with smiles, bowing with girlish pleasure to orchestra, chorus and audience, she advanced to the front of the platform. A thousand feminine hands

raised opera glasses to study her costume. The men waited their turn to satisfy their eyes by a nearer view of physical loveliness the equal of which not even Mr. Doddington could remember in festivals previous. Ordway hardly dared look up. He remembered "Faust," and Siebel, his first large impressions of the musical world, the scenes and the atmosphere with which this woman were inseparably associated.

He asked himself, Did he love her on that evening nearly three years ago? and he answered, No! it was then but a curious, boyishly patriotic interest he took in her. Now did he love her? It must be that his failure to raise his eyes would be noticed by his neighbors. It might cause troublesome comment. He looked up. She stood by the conductor's desk waiting for the prelude, and thus, motionless, she had the "grand air" that singers prize so highly. It was the serenity, apparently, of perfect command and knowledge. She was looking toward that part of the house where at previous concerts she had seen Billy's face. Her eyes looked straight into Ordway's.

Did he love her now? Yes, hopelessly, but with all his heart, he loved her.

There seemed in the smile which was meant to be general, and that was generally accepted by the audience, a special message for a fleeting fraction of a second to him. Encouragement? Of course—for his art! He so interpreted it, and it was a savagely steady glance that he shot back at her.

The temporary depression which had been upon Billy coincident with his discovery that Guarda was encumbered by a husband had disappeared. All this day he had been his usual, effervescent self. While the audience was still engaged in its share of the evening's performance, which share consisted at that moment of a noisy welcome to the prima donna, he whispered in a tone of affected deep satisfaction:

"Now we shall hear some real music."

"Shut up, Billy," whispered Ordway, in reply, twisting his features into a smile; "shut up, or I'll rise here and denounce you."

Billy chuckled audibly. Probably it was at thought of what form his friend's denunciation might take if only he half knew the facts.

Up went the conductor's baton, and a hush fell upon the house. Ordway was startled by it. He knew it was Guarda that the people held their breaths to hear, and not his music; but they would hear it. He fixed his eyes upon her during the brief introduction and held them there until that world-compelling voice began; then, so strong was the impression that she was singing to him, that he closed his eyes and thus remained to the end.

When he looked again she was retiring from the stage, bowing right and left and bestowing those matchless smiles with unstinted liberality. The audience went to such an extreme of demonstration that one might have forgotten that it was New England. Such a noise!



Up went the conductor's baton, and a hush fell upon the house.

See page 140.

There was more than hand-clapping. Shouts and cries were in the air.

Ordway sat rigid, his face ghastly pale.

"Bert!" exclaimed Billy, above the tumult, "do you realize that you're the only person in the house who isn't applauding?—the only one who hasn't gone crazy over it?"

Gone crazy! The composer shivered. Then he looked hesitatingly at his friend, and smiled; for, oh! it was sweet to hear the applause, bestowed, though he must know, indiscriminately upon the singer rather than upon the piece that had been his and was his alone no longer. At the worst, it had been his work that served as the vehicle for Guarda's success, and in her success he could rejoice only too heartily. For himself it was easy to feel, it was impossible not to feel, that there was testimony of approval; and for a moment the pain at the composer's heart became something akin to happiness.

The applause increased in volume, for Guarda was coming out to bow. Ordway ventured to turn his head and look over the house to see as well as hear the demonstration. For a moment his eyes roved around the great gallery, for it was up there that he could most readily see the audience. Then, a shade paler than before, he turned abruptly front again and pressed his lips together.

Guarda gave herself the trouble and pleasure of several recalls before she condescended to sing the care-

fully prepared encore piece; and after that there was another season of persistent applauding. Eventually, having come forth to bow at least as many times as ever a prima donna had done in any previous Festival, Guarda gave a pretty gesture that said plainly, "Well, if you must have it," and said something to the conductor. He opened the score of Ordway's aria, and the audience, recognizing the first phrase of the introduction, burst into another storm of hand-clapping.

"There!" exclaimed Billy, intensely excited; "did you notice that?"

But the noise subsided suddenly, and you might have heard his "that" all over the hall, for the introduction had been played and Guarda was singing again.

Billy had his chance at the end of the aria.

"You see, Bert," he said, "it was the music. They wanted that piece again. That was your success, old man. Don't make any mistake about that in your modest noddle. Do you see?"

"It is very gratifying," Ordway responded. "There are a couple of persons up in the gallery whom we know."

"So? Who?"

"Jane Twitchell and Barbara Kendall. I think we'd better go up and speak to them."

"Sure! I haven't seen Barbara since I left East Wilton, or Jane, either. Jane is more fun than a circus. I suppose they've drifted in for this one concert. I certainly haven't seen them before during the week. The

miscellaneous concert, you know, is always counted on to draw in the last musical straggler."

Thus he talked while they made their way up the aisle. A considerable proportion of the audience was also on the way out to chat in the lobby during intermission. Progress was necessarily slow, and Ordway had plenty of time for reflection and reminiscence. They had been with him since the instant when he caught sight of Barbara's face just above the balcony rail. He had hardly been conscious of Guarda's encore piece, or the repetition of his own aria.

Had Barbara recognized the piece? He wondered bitterly whether she understood it now.

It was at first the main impulse of the moment to discover if Barbara suspected or knew the authorship of the music, and, if so, to beg her for friendship's sake to hold her peace about it. What if already she had mentioned it to Jane? It might go then to the ends of the earth, for there was great momentum in any story that had the advantage of a start from Jane. That matter required his attention and would have it, though in emotion it was subordinated speedily to a keen sense of humiliation. He had loved Barbara. Till yesterday he had loved her. What manner of man was he that could so swiftly put aside the old love for this new, hopeless, impossible passion?

Upon his sensitive memory charged the scenes of old; the homely comfort of the Kendall sitting-room with its ancient pianoforte, where he tried and she judged

his anthems; the serene peace of the orchard, the joys of wandering over the meadows gathering wild flowers; above all, the sublimated purity of the atmosphere of which Barbara had seemed to be a part. Had seemed? Was now! Strange—or was it strange?—that in the first wild throbs of the new love he could remember and feel the charm of the old!

Ordway could not tell; he knew only that he was sadly troubled, and his perplexity was still tangled about him when he came face to face with Barbara. She and Jane had come down from the balcony to the lobby.

"Bert!" she said, gladly. "I thought you were coming out. We came down to meet you."

"And we were just going to find you."

He spoke gravely, and was not actor enough to smile even at unessential Jane when he greeted her. Billy was at hand, and for a moment the talk was general. Then Ordway and Barbara had a moment to themselves, as much as might be in the crowd that jammed around them.

"Are you enjoying it?" he asked.

"Oh! so much!" was the low reply.

There was surcharged in the tone the deep gratification of a starved soul. Ordway noticed it with a pang. It reminded him of his own years in the narrow, stifling atmosphere of the country village when he had had little more than his imagination to cheer him with visions of the larger world. A man of creative gifts usually comes to advanced years before he realizes fully that that which

gives him so much of toil and disappointment is his chief compensation for existence, setting him as it does above the level of the humdrum world and making him an aristocrat. A dim perception of the infinite advantage he had as compared with her came to him as he faced her in the lobby, but he could not dwell upon it. There was business for the moment.

"And Guarda," said he, steadily—"how do you like her?"

"Isn't she wonderful?" she responded, with bated breath. "I never heard anything like it."

"Her, or what she sang?"

"Both. I was so glad that she repeated the first piece!"

"You liked it, then, as music?"

"I suppose so," she answered, with some hesitation. "I don't know that I am able to distinguish between the music and just the singing. It takes study to do that, doesn't it?"

"There is no doubt that study helps."

"I know I should like to hear the piece again," she said, with a wistfulness that went as balm to the composer's heart; and then she added, "But I suppose that such a great singer could make anything sound well, couldn't she?" and that question whisked away the balm.

"I don't know about that," he retorted, rather roughly. "You don't imagine, do you, that Guarda's singing could dignify a coon song, or make you think that 'Sweet Marie' was good music?"

"Oh, no!" she responded, hastily, and she seemed to feel that somehow she had offended him; "but a great singer would not sing anything that was unworthy of her. You see, Bert," and she smiled timidly, "we poor simpletons who love music without knowing how or why must depend upon the singer. We must take it for granted that what she gives us is good until we arrive by study or experience at the state where we can discriminate for ourselves. Isn't that so?"

"I guess it is," said he.

"I hope it is," she went on, lightly, "for it saves us a lot of annoyance in making up our minds whether we like what we hear or not."

He had nothing to say to this. The subject had been probed sufficiently for his immediate purpose. Barbara had not the faintest idea that she ever had heard the aria before. The fantastic secret, therefore, was safe, but Ordway was not content, or relieved. On the contrary, he was young enough to nourish some bitterness because no lasting impression had been made upon the mind of this sincere girl by a musical sketch that she had heard in a fragmentary way some years before.

"Have you heard of Jane's good fortune?" she asked, after a short pause.

"No," he said, glad that the subject was changing. "Has a Prince Charming induced her to break her celebrated resolution?"

"Oh, dear, no! It is more prosaic and doubtless better than that. Jane has come into some money."

"Good gracious!"

"Isn't it strange? And the way of it is stranger still. You know her father went to California during the gold excitement of 1849?"

"Yes; and came back poorer than when he went out."

"Well, it seems that he had a friend out there who stuck to the mines. Jane remembers hearing her father speak of him when she was a little girl."

"Was Jane ever a little girl?"

"Bert! Anyway, this old friend died some months ago. He had no children, no relations of any kind so far as can be found out, and he left his property to Jane in token of his esteem for her father."

"That was good of him. Has she actually come into the money without a contest?"

"Yes; she has it in bank—all her own. How much do you think, Bert?"

"Don't ask me to guess. I should hate to overstate it."

"You couldn't. It's all of twenty thousand dollars."

"Well! That is a fortune for East Wilton!"

He was about to ask some questions about the matter when Jane edged up to them.

"Seems to me my ears are burning," she said. "Has Barbara told you?"

"Yes," replied Ordway, "and I congratulate you heartily."

"You'd better, for I'm enjoying wealth! There are plenty who have it and don't. I'm going to have a good

time the rest of my life. I've bought two new hats and this dress; see!" and she tried in the crush to stand off for Ordway's observation. "But you're only a man, and a blind one at that," she went on, "and wouldn't know a dress from a mealbag. I just simply want you to understand that I'm going it! This concert is my first spree. I'm coming to New York bye-and-bye, and I shall expect you boys to show me the town. Will you?"

"Will we!" exclaimed Billy, who was listening with dancing eyes. "Just try us! I'll make you pay your expenses."

"Of course!" said Jane, pertly. "I wouldn't ask a man to pay now for my soda water and car fares."

"Oh! I mean that I'd write up your experiences at so much per column. It would make bully copy! Think of the possible headlines. Jane Twitchell's Hot Time; or——"

"Billy! You put me in the paper and I'll take your head off!"

"Pshaw! Jane, you know well enough that nothing would delight you better than to see a line like this: 'Arrived, Fifth Avenue Hotel, Miss Jane Twitchell and suite.' Eh?"

Jane's retort was not uttered, for they heard the piercing notes of a cornet from the distant platform.

"Land!" she exclaimed; "there's the signal for beginning again. Come, Barbara!" and, with little formality

in the way of farewells, they hurried up to their seats in the balcony.

Billy started for the telegraph office to file his report while yet the singers who had appeared in the final number were responding to recalls. Ordway stemmed the outgoing tide of humanity and went to the room behind the platform, where the prima and the lesser lights were receiving the congratulations of the committeemen and such persons as were privileged by previous introduction to address them directly. Standing obscurely at some distance behind Guarda, and looking stolidly unmoved, was the tall form of Giuseppe Napoli. It was easy to imagine that the event bored him insufferably.

Ordway lingered at the door until Guarda saw him. Immediately she broke through the circle of her admirers and went to him, holding out her hand.

"Wasn't it glorious?" she exclaimed. "My voice was never better, and I never had an audience more completely under control. Didn't you think so?"

"Yes," he answered, gravely. "I came to congratulate you, and thank you, and to say good-bye."

"You are not leaving the Festival before the end?" she asked, in unmistakable astonishment.

"I must. I have a professional engagement in New York to-morrow."

A rehearsal, that could have been postponed, was to be held by Ordway's choir on the following evening.

"Ah, then," she said, "I shall see you there soon."

"About the aria," he added, with a trace of embarrassment, "I said the other evening that you could do with it as you wished. I meant it, and I shall leave the music with you."

"Thank you," she responded, promptly, and yet she looked as if she did not understand fully; "we will talk about that in New York. If you must go, good-by!"

He was troubled by every detail of this meeting, which he would have avoided if there had been any way in courtesy to do so. The pressure of her hand in greeting and again in farewell; the searching, eager look in her eyes; her beauty, brilliant under the excitement of triumph, her insistence that she would see him again, and, perhaps above all, though Ordway at the moment might not have acknowledged it, her utter failure to say in so many words that his music had been contributory to her success.

Shortly after midnight, Ordway was trying to sleep in a train bound for New York.

X.

Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.

—Shakespeare.

It was after breakfast on the morning following the departure of Ordway. Billy was in his room attempting to meditate over a cigar. In sorry fact, that audacious individual was in a panic of trepidation. Under some shirts in the bottom drawer of his bureau was a certain square parcel.

Billy was going to start for New York after the final concert in the evening. He could not leave the parcel where it was, and he had no mind to take it with him. There was really but one course open to him. Singular that he should have hesitated, and debated it, and shrunk from it.

A second cigar followed the first to his lips, and when it was lighted, he drew his chair close to the bureau and opened the bottom drawer. He pulled the shirts from off the parcel, rested his elbows on his knees, and stared at it. He blew a column of white smoke down at it, and watched the wreaths rebound and rise, blue, curling and diaphanous. Not by so thin a cloud as tobacco smoke was that evidence of his guilt to be concealed.

"Confound it!" said Billy, all to himself; "I'm not sorry I did it, not a little bit, and I won't say so; but I wish some other fellow had this part of it to do."

He looked at his watch; after ten o'clock. Guarda surely had breakfasted by this time. That she might still be at table had been the transparent excuse thus far for his delay in restoring her property to her. Of course he might send it to her with a note of explanation and apology; and he might delay sending it till after the evening concert; or he might ship it by express, anonymously, to her hotel in New York. All these and some other evasive devices had occurred to him only to be dismissed with frank contempt that he should be weak enough even to think of them.

"I'll face the music, of course," said he, "and I might as well do it now and be done with it."

Resolutely he picked up the parcel and started from his room, laying his unfinished cigar upon the wash stand. Once in the corridor, he decided to send up his card, and in his heart, suddenly coward, he hoped that she would be too busy to see him. His way to the office took him past Guarda's suite. Elise, whom he recognized as the prima's maid, was knocking at the door adjoining Guarda's rooms.

It was opened as Billy went by, and he heard Elise say, in French:

"Madame will go to rehearsal."

Billy knew enough French to understand this, and he understood also the single word, "Bien," in response,

from the person within. That person was the haughty Giuseppe Napoli.

The reporter turned his head to take quick measurement of the distance from Napoli's door to that of the prima. Then he said "Huh!" very softly and returned to his room, putting the parcel back in the bottom drawer. His cigar had not gone out, and he finished it on the way to rehearsal.

Guarda and other singers were on the platform, preparing for the oratorio of the evening. Billy sauntered down the side of the hall and presently caught her eye. She bowed and smiled, and made a gesture to show that she wished to speak to him. Almost at the same moment there came a cue for her and she had to sing. Billy sat down in the front row and waited. When there came a pause in her duties she went down the platform steps and joined him.

"Tell me," she said at once, "have you said something nice about me in the paper this morning? I'm just dying for the New York papers to come!"

"I said you did very well considering the music you had to sing," replied Billy.

"Oh!" and she affected a tone of reproach, "I am quite sure that what you have really said was that the music was worthy of a greater singer. I don't believe your enthusiasm for your friend would permit you to say anything very good of a singer."

"But I couldn't speak of Ordway's music as his. You wouldn't let me."

"I know. It was better that way. Tell me about him."

"Don't you think now," he asked, ignoring her demand, "that it would have been just as well, even better, to make an announcement of the facts about the aria?"

"No." she answered, decidedly. "I made a success with it, yes; but how could I be sure of doing so in advance? It was better this way, notwithstanding all your arguments and those of Mr. Biddle. Tell me about Mr. Ordway."

"Yes'm," said Billy, meekly, and she laughed.

"He went away last night very abruptly," she continued, "and though he said good-bye and left the music with me, he did not give me his address. Do you know it?"

"Rather! Bert and I live together."

"Really?"

"Yes. We have an elegant flat of four rooms. His pianoforte takes up all of one of them, there are two bedrooms, and when we want to talk to each other we go into the kitchen or out on the fire escape."

"How nice! What fun you two fellows—pardon! I mean, gentlemen—must have!"

"I'd rather you'd say fellows."

"I will if you will give me your combined address. I shall want to see you both in the city."

Billy scribbled the address upon a card and gave it to her. Their talk was then inconsequential until Guarda exclaimed, *sotto voce*, "Ah—my cue!" She began to

sing at once, and marched up the steps to the platform, singing away for dear life, and causing a smile to adorn the worn features of the conductor.

It was time for dinner at the end of the rehearsal; then followed immediately the afternoon concert; and some thirty minutes after that was a thing of the past Billy knocked at Guarda's parlor. He had the square parcel under his arm.

At that moment Signor Napoli was smoking cigarettes in the billiard hall. Billy had seen him there.

Elise opened the door and Guarda herself, hearing his voice, bade him enter. Billy went in with the parcel held behind him, and he kept it there until Elise had left the room. Meantime Guarda was smiling at him, but with inquiry in her eyes, for his manner was helplessly portentous.

"Did you ever see this before?" he asked, holding the parcel toward her.

She knew it at a glance.

"My aria!" she cried. "Where did you find it?"

What an opportunity that innocent question opened for ready fiction!

"I didn't find it," said Billy.

"Didn't find it!" she echoed.

"No. I stole it!"

Guarda had taken the parcel from his hand. For a moment she looked at him; then at the parcel; then at him again.

"You stole it?" said she. "Is this one of your jokes? Am I too dense to see the point?"

"I hope not," he answered, "but the joke requires a map. I was in the hall when you came in for your first rehearsal. I saw your music placed on the platform. Biddle had told me what you were to rehearse that morning. I thought I saw a way to do a good thing for Bert without doing any real harm to anybody. So I walked carelessly by the platform. The men were busy with their tuning up; nobody paid any attention to me; I slipped the parcel under my coat and sat there with it while you and everybody were going frantic over its disappearance. It has been in my room ever since. Ordway doesn't know the first thing about this. If he should ever hear of it he would never speak to me again. He's a man of plumb-line honor. I'm just a——"

Billy's characterization of himself was lost in Guarda's peal of uncontrollable laughter. During the first part of his speech she had listened with undisguised amazement, incredulity almost.

Then, as the recital proceeded and all the circumstances recurred to her in flashes, she was filled, first with positive admiration for the reporter's boldness and cunning combined, and then his evident shamefacedness now overpowered her, and for once "sense of humor" had full sway.

As her laughter on previous occasions had been infectious, so now it set Billy to grinning sheepishly.

"I didn't come here to say that I was sorry," he be-

gan; "I only don't want you to misunderstand Ordway. He would have cut off his hands rather than consent——"

"Could he cut them both off?" she screamed, and sank to a chair in a paroxysm of renewed laughter.

"Well," said Billy, "he could cut one off and hold the other against a buzz-saw. I don't see anything so very hard in that, or funny, either."

"No, I should say there wouldn't be anything funny in holding one's hand against a buzz-saw! Oh! Billy!—Billy Jameson! You are a sad case! The idea that I could suspect Mr. Ordway of such—such duplicity! What is the word for it?"

"Machiavellian?"

"I guess so, thought it doesn't sound crooked enough to do justice to the affair. No, Billy; you may rest easy so far as your friend is concerned. His honesty is as transparent as your rougery is appalling. Oh, dear!"

She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and then to her lips to check the tide of her mirth. He looked down at her for a moment and then said, gravely:

"You called me Billy."

"Did I?" she responded, choking afresh, for every word he uttered seemed to provoke her risibility.

"Guarda, I allow only those who love me to call me Billy."

"Well, that's easy. I love you."

"It must be to distraction, Guarda."

"To distraction it is, Billy. Anything so that I can call you what I please."

She bent over the parcel of music, opening it, and chuckling repeatedly as she saw the familiar pages. Thus she did not observe the momentary shadow that crossed his face, or see the way he shut his jaws together.

"This might be regarded as a dangerous conversation," said he, with successfully assumed lightness. "I wonder what the signor would say of it?"

Guarda frowned, but her expression cleared instantly, and she laughed again, this time as if something reminiscent had stirred her mirth.

"The signor doesn't count," she said.

Without pause she arose and held out her hand, adding: "If you feared to confess this charming fraud please understand that you are freely forgiven."

"Then, you don't mind?"

"Mind! I wouldn't have missed it all for anything. We shall be great friends—you and I and Mr. Ordway. Think what a hold I shall always have on you! If you are ever naughty I shall only have to threaten to tell Mr. Ordway, and you'll become as nice as a kitten."

"That's right enough, Guarda. I'd hold my own hands against a buzz-saw rather than let him know about it."

"He shall never know from me. Tell me, did all this intricate scheme, with its possibilities of detection and failure, occur to you while you were in the hall?"

And she made him go over the circumstances in the greatest detail, compelling him to invent rather copiously to cover the episodes with Ordway that first night; but he made it perfectly clear that the composer had not so much as suspected the true state of the case. Guarda was unaffectedly interested, and when they parted it was with urgency on her part that he should call upon her in the city, and promise on his part to do so.

As he went down to dinner he thought wrathfully of Napoli.

"How she enjoys a laugh!" he thought. "What could have possessed her to tackle to him? Can she ever have a laugh with that withered husk?"

Two questions, the answers to which, as it happened, Billy never learned.

ANDANTE CON MOTO.

I.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's ox,
nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

—Word of God.

Following the Boxford festival, Guarda was engaged upon a somewhat extended concert tour. Her appearances in one place and another were recorded in the musical journals, to some of which Ordway was a subscriber. It was not his habit to pay attention to the movements of public singers, but he kept track of hers. One day he saw his own name in a paper. Guarda had sung his aria somewhere, and the reporter had included a condensation of the programme in his account of the concert. A part of it read as follows:

Suite, Arlesienne.....	Bizet
Scena and Aria.....	Ordway
Fifth Symphony.....	Beethoven.

Billy, to whom Ordway showed the paper, was hugely delighted.

“You’re arriving, all right,” said he.

“Pooh!” responded Ordway, affecting a contempt for that that made a warm glow in his heart, “what does it amount to? Just the performance of a song in some out-of-the-way place where I never was heard of.”

"Idiot!" was Billy's judicially calm remark.

"I can't see that it should justify me in building air castles or in holding my head any higher."

"You don't need any stimulus for the building of air castles, my son," said Billy, severely; "but as for holding your head higher, do you think it is nothing to be sandwiched in between such men as Bizet and Beethoven? They're rather promising composers, aren't they?"

"I admit that I'm in pretty good company."

"And you've been heard of in that out-of-the-way place now, haven't you, to say nothing of the people who will read this report——"

"And forget it."

"Nonsense! I know well enough you're bursting with conceited joy. That's all right. It's sensible not to show it; but let me call your attention to a very subtle testimony to your growing fame. Observe," and Billy read the names, impressively, "Bizet, Ordway, Beethoven. Is there anything less imposing in Ordway than in Bizet? But the point is that you're not identified by your first name, or your residence, or even your nationality—just Ordway. That means as much to those western concert-goers as would Svendsen in the same place on the programme, or Godard, or Bortnianski, or any other blessed foreigner. I tell you, you're coming up."

Ordway smiled contentedly, and in due course sent the paper, with the paragraph marked, to his mother.

He had a great deal to think of in those days—perhaps it would be better to say that he did a great deal of thinking.

Much that was merely rustic in his manner of thought as well as action had been rubbed away by his three years' contact with the city. Between the high walls of the town there is a mental atmosphere such as the country cannot maintain. Ordway had breathed it to the full with lungs that hungered for it. His outlook had broadened as it cannot when the material eye leaps across pleasant vales that sparkle with stream and lake jewels to the blue tops of distant mountains. One may love Nature; he may find his serenest, profoundest joy in lying on his back where moss supplements the thin turf of a lofty ledge, watching the clouds that drift aimlessly and lose themselves with fascinating mystery in the blue, or turning to observe the birds twittering away at the comedies and tragedies of their lives, or straining his ear to catch the illusive harmony of the sinking brook below and the sighing pines above; he may pluck wildflowers, note the cheerful spots of color where cattle crop the grass, dream poems about the vine-bowered cottage where lives the farmer, or the artisan; and yet he will fly from all these to the city as gladly as a vociferous robin takes to the tops of budding trees.

The completest life is that in which the mind toils in the city and takes to the fields for rest.

Ordway, young, and with a buoyancy unnoted by the casual acquaintance because of his dominating

seriousness, had not arrived at the stage where the whirl and stress of urban activity had exhausted him. He was still keen for the struggle. There had been no little compensation for the privations incident to the struggle in the associations to which he came, partly through Billy and the newspaper boys, and partly through his slowly growing professional relationships. He enjoyed the sparkle of reporters' keen comments on men and things; he even found some measure of satisfaction in the professional musicians who talked shop rather than art over their beer after a concert, for they spoke as men having ideas, even if it were fairly patent that their utterances were but the reflections of the ideas of others.

So Ordway was broader than before. He was conscious of it, and undoubtedly believed with perfect sincerity that he was a great deal broader and that he knew a great deal more than was actually the fact. But there was that in him, of which also he was vaguely conscious, that three years in the liberalizing atmosphere of the city could not brush away, rub out, or revolutionize. It was not to be defined in a word, that conservatism, stability, morality—call it what you will—that becomes a man sprung from generations of pure, uneventful lives. It was to this inheritance that the curious in such matters may trace the extraordinary disturbance that had been his secret trouble, unknown to and unsuspected by Billy, since the Boxford Festival.

Many a long evening when Billy was busy with newspaper duties, Ordway walked the streets and wrestled with himself. That he should dismiss Giulia Guarda, utterly and forever, from his thoughts appeared to him as plain duty. There was no argument about it, for it admitted of none. What troubled, surprised and appalled him was the fact that he could not do it. She stood by him when he worked, whether with his pupils or at his music paper, particularly at the latter occupation. He was too clever an analyst not to trace directly to her influence the abundant melodies that sang in his inner consciousness and took form under his pen. Never had he composed with such facility, such felicity; at times it was almost with abandon. It was all Guarda, and he knew it; but Guarda was a married woman, and it seemed to him not less than horrible that he should be unable to think of her other than as a conventional friend.

A right-thinking man who loves fortunately looks upon himself as the most blessed of God's creatures. With adorable conceit he differentiates himself from the mass of his fellow beings and regards himself as singled out for incredible happiness. He views this extraordinary relation of himself to the rest of the world with glad surprise, finding it very hard to believe that he is worthy of so much bliss.

With Ordway the surprise took on a very different cast.

"Is it possible that I," he asked himself, with strenu-

ous emphasis on the Ego, "that I, of all men, can tolerate thoughts of this kind?—that it has come to me to face a situation that is pregnant with scandal?—that in my secret thoughts I dally with elements that in all ages have been productive of tragedy?"

If it occurred to him that his hopeless passion certainly linked him with all mankind and identified him with the mass, the hod-carrier as well as with the prince, the reflection gave him no comfort. Rather would such a view have added to his mortification. Rather did he condemn himself unsparingly for his inability to repress yearnings that he coldly regarded as profanation to her. For, of course, he idealized Guarda.

In his long walks and the silent hours when work stood still, he tried to accustom himself to thinking of her as Madame Napoli. It might not be amiss to love Julia Ward, or Giulia Guarda—the form of the name mattered nothing; but Madame, Mrs. Napoli, that was unthinkable. And that being the case, he thought of it; but his device, quaint though it may seem to any of larger sophistication, and his persistent endeavors to re-establish a correct point of view, were of such avail at last that he believed he had conquered, or was conquering, what he chose to regard as his weakness.

Then one day he read in his musical journal that Guarda was to sing at a concert in Philadelphia. It was that very evening. He wondered if his aria would be on the programme? In any event, it might be a good thing as a disciplinary measure to go to the

concert. Thus he could test the mastery he had acquired over his emotions, and, facing the impossible situation in her very presence, he should come away strengthened. Billy need know nothing about his journey, for trains between New York and Philadelphia ran at such frequent intervals that he could probably be back and asleep before Billy was done with his night's work at the newspaper office.

So, sincerely enough, but under some measure of self-deceit, nevertheless, Ordway took train for Philadelphia and arrived in time to hear the opening number of the concert. To his considerable satisfaction, his aria was indeed on the programme, and again he had the pleasure of seeing his name paraded in the company of the great.

He had a seat in the back row of the balcony, choosing the location, in so far as he had any choice, partly from his habitual motive of economy and partly from fear that Guarda might see and recognize him if he sat nearer the platform. His satisfaction deepened as he observed that he was taking a sane interest in the music of the first two numbers. One was an overture, the other a suite. He enjoyed them both, and until the conductor laid down his baton at the end of the suite he was convinced that the Philadelphia experiment was a proper success.

Mechanically he referred to his programme, for he knew that it was the turn of Guarda and his aria next. Of a sudden his memory harked back to a scene of

his childhood. He was in school. It was "Exhibition Day," and ranged in borrowed chairs around the sides of the room were all his world—his father and mother, the minister, the school committee, benevolent old Dr. Hubbard, and grouty old Sam Sanders, the grocer ("Crab Sanders," the boys used to call him); pensive Miss Whitcomb, who made dresses, trimmed hats, and taught a class in the Sunday school; Deacon Giddings, whose "Gosh darn it!" was famous all over East Wilton because the only time he ever had been known to use such impious words was the occasion when his unmanageable horse backed his carryall straight into the door of the church after service; and the mothers and aunts of all the boys and girls. Everybody was dressed in his and her best, particularly the "scholars," and down in the front row was himself, a lump in his throat and an infinite pressure of apprehension against his breast because in a half-minute more he would be called on to speak his piece:

"Stand! the ground's your own, my braves!
Will ye give it up to slaves?"

Those were the first lines to be piped by his tiny treble in public, and he wondered, with mighty quakings for so small a bosom, whether he would forget them at the critical moment, and whether he could speak loud enough for Dr. Hubbard, who was slightly deaf, to hear?

All this came back to him now, and with him, multiplied to accord with his stature, were the lump in the

throat, the pressure of apprehension against his breast, and the heart quaking when the door at the back of the platform opened to admit Guarda to view.

Queenly and radiant, she swept down the aisle of violinists to the front and made her gracious obeisance. Ordway did not close his eyes. The corners of his mouth were drawn down in the effort to appear and be absolutely unmoved. He looked, and looked, and the tempest raged within him.

Once while she was singing he wished that she had chosen any other aria than his own, for again he could not disabuse his fancy of the impression that this, his song, manifest in her voice, was a direct message from her soul to his. He wanted to flee, and could not; he wished that he had not come, and he knew that nothing within his reasonable hopes could have persuaded him to part with the pain of this experience.

Again he seemed to be the only person in the audience who did not applaud. Guarda's success was unequivocal and immense. There was the customary succession of recalls and the inevitable encore, and through it all Ordway sat with clenched jaws and wrinkled brow, his programme crushed in a shapeless wad. When the emotional tumult of the others had passed, those others who had been stirred to some degree, perhaps, by his music—those others to whom the singer was but a musical machine, a thing of beauty, impersonal—he sat motionless and tried to follow the symphony. Before it was half done he knew that the

main immediate desire of his life was that it would come to end.

The echo of the last chord was still vibrating in the air when he got up and pushed hurriedly past others in the back row to the aisle. He had but dim perception of the plan that had formed in his mind. The concert was done, and he wanted to get away from it. Men and women impeded him, for the percentage that does not wait for the last chord was ahead of him. The stairs led not directly to the street, but to the general entrance, and there the crush was great. He elbowed his way into the main current, and then the sound of a familiar voice speaking his name caused his heart to stand still. He turned half around, and there was Billy.

"You here, Bert?" said Billy, at no pains to disguise his astonishment.

"Yes," replied Ordway, awkwardly; "they did my aria, you know."

"Uh-huh," Billy responded, indifferently. "Pretty fair sort of piece, isn't it?"

"It was in good company again," said Ordway.

They went out together, and as the cool air of night touched their faces, Ordway knew that but for Billy's presence he would have gone around to the stage entrance to be near when Guarda went to her carriage.

II.

There is the potentiality of the libertine in every Puritan. —The Hermit.

"Why didn't you say you were coming on?" asked Billy, as they set out for the railroad station.

Ordway could answer honestly that he had not known of the concert until that very morning, since which time he and the reporter had not met.

"And yourself," he added; "why didn't you speak of it?"

"Oh!" said Billy, "a newspaper man never knows where he is going to dine, you know. I had to run over to Philadelphia, and so I dropped in at the concert. Sings well, doesn't she?"

"Superbly."

Billy took a side glance at his companion and pursed his lips. He was remarkably thoughtful and silent, for him.

Ordway took it upon himself to do talking enough for both, reversing, for the occasion, the usual conversational relations between them.

"You're altogether right, Billy," he said, with vehemence that might pass for earnestness; "it's a good thing to be on such programmes. It makes for prestige

and success elsewhere. I must bring the attention of singers to others of my songs. I've any number of things that are worthy of being on recital programmes; don't you think so?"

"Of course," said Billy. "Are you getting any royalty for the use of the aria?"

"No; I don't want anything from that."

"Why not?"

"Well, because I don't. That's an exception, you see. To put it grossly, the advertising I get from its occasional use by Madame Guarda is as much compensation as I ought to expect."

"But I haven't a doubt she'd pay a royalty."

"Neither have I. She has intimated as much, very plainly."

"Then why don't you ask for it?"

"Because I don't want it. Isn't that reason enough? There was no shadow of commercial impulse behind the composition of that piece. It was done for art's sake, and I prefer to keep it in that atmosphere. You can allow a musician to cherish a little sentiment, can't you?"

"Huh!" said Billy.

The reporter had doubts. He half believed and wholly feared that his friend was dodging his questions. That Ordway was notoriously not clever at evasion was presumptive evidence that Billy's first impression on seeing him in Philadelphia was incorrect; and, as the composer did not say plainly that he would not

accept a royalty from a woman with whom he was madly in love, Billy had to dispose of his doubts as best he could.

Ordway veered away from the subject of Guarda and his aria, and all the way to the station he prattled with nervous animation about his songs and the singers to whom he would show them with a view to creating a mercantile value for his writings. By the time they were aboard a train, his unusual effort at conversation had exhausted both his tongue and his invention, and they journeyed in silence, for Billy had nothing to say.

It was a week or ten days after this that Billy, having an early morning assignment, had to get up in time to breakfast with Ordway. There were some letters for the composer, and he took them unopened to the restaurant. He read them while the meal was being prepared, Billy devoting himself to the morning paper. One of the letters, dated at a fashionable hotel uptown, was as follows:

“Dear Mr. Ordway: Are you never going to keep your promise to call on me? I shall be at home tomorrow at three, and shall feel truly offended if you do not present yourself. Do call, and bring that absurd friend of yours, Billy What’s-his-name, with you. If you do not come I shall expect to hear that you are in a hospital, or dead.

Sincerely,

“Giulia Guarda.”

“Put down your paper a minute, Billy,” said Ordway, and he tossed the letter across the table.

Billy read the note with unchanging expression, tossed it back, and said: "Now, you've got to go."

"I suppose so. Will you repeat your invitation of last week and accompany me?"

Guarda's arrival in town had been announced in the daily papers. More than one had printed an interview with her. Ordway had said nothing, and Billy had called his attention to her presence by suggesting that they call on her together. At that time the composer had declined rather testily, saying that he was busy and had nothing to say to the lady. Billy had given vent to some characteristic remarks on the subject of idiocy, and the matter had been dropped.

"I think," said Billy, "that I can manage it. Three o'clock, does she say?"

"Yes. I suppose we will make the acquaintance of Signor Napoli, this time."

"Ugh!" grunted the reporter. "It must be a tremendous business to be entertained by that wreck."

"I've no desire to know him," said Ordway. "I thought of him when you spoke of calling last week."

"Did you?" Billy's brows rose a bit, and Ordway glanced aside, calling the waiter to bring him something he had no use for. "Well," Billy continued, "I don't think that you'll be troubled by him."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing more than I say, and that's only conjecture; but I think Guarda has him pretty thoroughly subdued,

and that she doesn't trot him out for the entertainment of her particular friends."

"I wasn't aware that I was a particular friend of the lady."

"Well, you might be, and you ought to be. You're not making the best of your opportunity, old man."

"Perhaps not. I'll call on her. Of course it's the courteous thing to do; but I'd like to have you along to keep me in countenance."

"What are you afraid of?"

Ordway twisted his features into an absurd grimace, guiltily conscious that otherwise he could not prevent betrayal of emotion that might incite Billy to further inquiry. It was quite extraordinary what a way Billy had acquired lately of asking unwelcome questions. "I shrink from her flattery," said Ordway; "you can take the edge off by making her laugh."

"If that's what's needed," responded Billy, moodily, "it's lucky her laugh lies so close to her lips. All right, Bert; I'll meet you there, if it's a possible thing, at three o'clock."

At the time appointed Ordway went into the hotel office. Billy was not in evidence, but Signor Napoli was. That severe and withered Tuscan was sitting in solemn solitude on a bench, smoking cigarettes, seeing nothing, apparently, but the visions of his own ruminations. The sight of this man gave Ordway a dull sense of discomfort. He walked up and down the long office several times, wishing that Billy would arrive. It came

to be ten minutes past the hour. Billy had not appeared, and Ordway had debated sufficiently whether he would run away, or face the situation manfully.

In point of hard fact he had not thought seriously of evading the ordeal, and he was none too sorry that Billy was not present. To ask him to be along had been a confession of fear that Billy himself had perceived instantly. Ordway did fear, for himself, and he preferred, now that he thought of it, to endure by his own strength.

The misgivings, and the dread, and, mingled with them, the eager anticipation, with which he saw a boy disappear with his card, vanished as he went upward in the elevator. He arrived at Guarda's door in composure that astonished him.

"Ah!" she said, quietly, "I had begun to believe that you had cut me."

She was smiling, cordial, and the touch of her hand was gratefully warm, as at Boxford; but for the moment there was little of the vivacity that had characterized her demeanor there.

"No," he responded; "I have been very busy."

"Composing?"

"Partly."

"I wish you would let me see some of your work."

Before he thought, Ordway had responded that he would be only too glad to show her his new music. He regretted it instantly—that is, he perceived that he had held open the door to the further meetings that he

believed to be inadvisable to say the least; but the memory of her ready appreciation, her sympathy of the kind that does not need to be expressed in words, swerved his judgment, and he stood committed.

"I am planning some recitals," she said, "and I should be sorry if I could not include a group of your songs. Haven't you fallen into the fashion and written a cycle?"

"No," he replied, almost speechless at the opportunity she presented. No one knew better than he that not a composer in the country would have felt other than flattered at the suggestion. The risen men might have affected to take it complacently for granted that Guarda would sing their songs, but the rising men, and all the younger, unknown fry like himself, would have been elated to the degree of intoxication. It was like him to take the suggestion in all seriousness, and swiftly to analyze it as the result of her admiration for his aria. She would not sing that unless she believed in it, and, embarrassing as it might be to modesty, it was natural that she should turn to its composer for other works of merit. Thus it appeared to him that there was no shadow of personal interest in the matter—that the suggestion was made to him as the composer, not to Herbert Ordway, the man and friend. How could it be otherwise when she had had such slight contact with him?

Ordway, when he asked this question in the swift flashing of his thoughts, overlooked the fact that he had fallen in love with Guarda in that same brief period.

He was elated, therefore, as any young composer would have been; and under the circumstances, as he viewed them, he found it singularly easy to talk with her. The distressing problem of his undue regard for her retreated in his consciousness while he told her of his songs, and her interest was so keen, and her manner so unaffectedly calculated to put him at his ease, that presently he had drifted to the pianoforte and was running over some of his compositions from memory, with laughing apology for his choir-master's voice.

"Never mind," she said, in response to this; "I will eventually be your voice."

How quickly the foolish heart leaps to the apprehension of unintended significance in the utterances of one who, consciously or unconsciously, has possessed it! Ordway's color rose, his fingers stumbled, and he hoped devoutly that Guarda did not notice. She did. As he preluded and began to sing, she drew back, and her eyes nearly closed while she kept her gaze fixed intently upon him.

"Beautiful!" she murmured, softly, at the end.
"Where did you find the words?"

"I wrote them," said Ordway, simply.

"And you are a poet also!" she exclaimed, wonder and admiration in her tone.

"Well," and he laughed deprecatingly, "I don't assert claim to that title. I have too much respect for it; but I think things, you know, and it's rather better to write

them out than keep them knocking about in one's head."

Guarda was deeply interested. He saw and felt that, and under the temptation of so much and so dear appreciation, he played and sang one thing after another, all to words of his own, "Sturm und Drang" pieces and others, till, suddenly, he stood up, confused and alarmed. It was all so intensely personal. How could she help perceiving it?

"I must have some of those songs," she said, quite gravely.

He hardly heard her. The Puritan that lurked in his nineteenth century blood commanded him to turn away his eyes from her.

III.

. . . And in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in hell;
Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.

—Milton.

"You are welcome to them all," he said, but he did not look at her; he could not command his lips to smile, or his voice to rise above a whisper.

There was a pause, and he did not know by visual evidence that she was looking at him again through almost closed eyes; but he felt the searching, and he was in torment lest she should see too much.

"I have occupied your time unconscionably," he added, hastily, and turned to get his hat.

Her manner changed, and for a brief space he seemed to be back in the hotel at Boxford. Darting ahead of him, she caught up his hat and held it behind her.

"Take it if you dare!" she cried, her eyes aglow with vivacity and laughter. "My time is nothing save as I command it. I choose that you shall occupy more of it."

"My own, then," said he, gruffly, for he was rebelling bitterly against the display of emotion into which he had been led.

"Ah! that may be quite another matter," and she was grave again; "but if it is business that calls you, I must still ask you to wait a moment, as I want to speak of a matter of business."

He steeled himself for what, with the best of intentions on her part, could be only an affront, for he anticipated that she would renew her offer to buy his aria, or pay him royalties for the use of it.

"I have been singing your piece," she went on, rapidly, "every place where I could smuggle it into the programmes since you gave it to me in Boxford. It is very successful. People speak of it, and like enough some of them mean what they say. When a man offers to put money into it you can certainly count on his sincerity. That is what has happened."

"I don't understand," said Ordway, guardedly.

"A publisher has asked for the privilege of bringing it out. It would be most unfair and unfriendly to you not to speak of it. What shall I tell him? Or do you prefer to see him, yourself?"

Thus she placed another opportunity before him, and this was one from which not even his heightened sensitiveness need shrink. It solved the question of royalties, for the publisher would pay them, and Guarda still could sing the aria without cost. Yet Ordway hesitated a moment.

"If this had happened—this opportunity, I mean," he said, "a year ago, or before the Boxford Festival, I should have jumped at it. Now—"

"What is the difference now, Mr. Ordway?"

"The circumstances under which you came to use the piece were peculiar."

"Decidedly!" and, in spite of the seriousness that was upon her, she quivered with the laughter she could not wholly suppress.

"You took it," continued Ordway, wondering a little at her mirth, but forgetting it soon after, "in place of an aria that you had bought for your exclusive use. I should like it better if you would consider my aria as literally replacing the one that was lost. So I would have you say to inquirers that the piece is not for publication."

He was almost happy for a moment. It was clear that he had pleased her, and so much was joy. The look that she gave him seemed to be inspired by gratitude.

"Very well," she said, quietly; "but if you are so generous that you will not consider the matter from a business point of view, I must do so for you. The commercial value of the music will increase the longer it is used exclusively. I have only begun to use it, you understand. By and by, when the demand for it becomes even greater, we will see about publication. Now as to these others—you won't hold them back, will you?"

"No; I will offer them for publication."

"Then bring me a bundle of your manuscripts and let us make a selection of a group. You will only need

to tell a publisher that I am going to bring them out in recitals to get them accepted at good terms. You will bring them to-morrow?"

Her manner had become eager and insistent. Ordway replied that he would.

"Good!" she said. "I shall enjoy so much trying such songs with my own voice. How happy you must be to be able to write things such as they are!"

"Happy!" he exclaimed, and turned away abruptly.

"Yes," said she; "why not? Doesn't creative work enable you to dwell in an atmosphere of ideality? And is it not happiness to see a thing of beauty grow before you, and realize that it is you who make it?"

It is an imperative necessity of love that it should be expressed, and the manner of its expression may be one thing or another, according to the individual and circumstances. It sets light-headed men to gabbling; others, of more serious cast, take to writing verses which, though they may be torn up shamefacedly in later years, serve their purpose for the moment. The bitterness of hopeless love demands its vent with equal insistence, and it may take advantage of any channel that offers. Guarda had opened a gate through which Ordway's restrained agony could find momentary exit without, as he thought, betraying its real character.

"You cannot tell," he said, vehemently, "unless you yourself have the creative impulse, what tortures it is capable of inflicting. Its potentiality for disappointment, grief, heart-sickness, is infinite! You speak of

an atmosphere of ideality! Why, madame, the composer suffers most acutely because that is exactly what he cannot dwell in! Unhappily he perceives it, he knows what it must be, what reward of happiness there must be in it, and his whole life is a hopeless endeavor to attain to it. Seldom does he achieve the perfect beauty he seeks. In the honest secret of his heart he knows that he is constantly contriving failures. He has a horribly keen perception of his limitations. Can it be happiness to strive eternally for the unattainable?

"Of course," he concluded, gloomily, "I speak for myself. There may be, doubtless are, composers who are unconscious of their limitations. They may indeed be happy, and I envy them their conceit. Yes, they may be happy—if other circumstances are favorable."

"I confess that I hadn't thought of it in just this way," said Guarda. "Does it mean that your beautiful songs are always just short of what you had hoped for them?"

"Yes. There are apparent exceptions. I think of songs that seem to me now to be perfect within the limitations that the words set for them; but I have discovered that such a conviction is unhappily subject to change with the lapse of time. Then there is the exception that may be described as a composition that had not revealed its full beauty to the composer until he heard it interpreted by a master. That may be delusive, too; but that is the case, madame, with the aria you are using. You revealed that to me in such a light

as I had not dreamed of. I don't care to hear anybody else sing it; I don't want to think that anybody else attempts it."

"Really," said she, smiling, but not frivolously, "I thought I had learned how to respond to compliments; but I cannot think of a thing to say to that."

"Don't try," he retorted, sharply. "When it comes to happiness I can think of nothing more supreme than the ability to interpret beauty as you do. I have thought of you as the happiest person I ever met."

"Oh!" cried Guarda, as if pained, and "Oh!" again, as she stood up with a dramatic gesture. "Me?" she went on, in tones of resentful incredulity. "Me happy? You are not one who flatters; you speak the truth—and you think of me as happy!"

"Yes," said Ordway, blankly. "As you remarked to me, why not?"

"What have I accomplished?" she demanded, with more than his vehemence. "Where am I? The applauded soloist of country festivals, the occasional soloist at symphony concerts in the minor cities; a person talked about because—because, forsooth, between me and my manager we induce the newspapers to print paragraphs and interviews! Pah! is that success? It is but the hard road that must be traveled, I suppose, to attain success. Do you know, Mr. Ordway, that I cannot get an engagement at the opera? No, I will not say that, for of course I can get one—I can join the company any time I am willing to accept a second-

ary position in it. ‘That I will not do! I will be first—first or nothing! Is there anybody there,’ and she swept her hand in the direction of the Metropolitan Opera House, ‘you, who speak the truth, tell me—is there anybody there who sings better than I do? Or as well?’

‘There is nobody who sings to me as you do,’ said he.

‘I knew it! I believe you, for you mean all you say, and you are as expert as any. Shall I, then, accept a secondary place, or permit any other to stand in the front rank? No! I will make them come to me and place me where I belong. I want an engagement at Baireuth. I want to be sought for by Covent Garden and the Grand Opera at Paris. I have sung in these latter places—yes, but not as the first. I can be supreme in the provinces; I must and will be in the cities. Till then there is no happiness for Giulia Guarda.’

She paused, all but breathless, and stood before him, tense, beautiful, imposing in her passion. There was a false note in her harangue that jarred on her listener, but he could not tell why, for he was whelmed by her passion and too deeply enmeshed in his own hopeless adoration. Moreover, as sincerity is ever a great force in itself, he was irresistibly stirred, for, as her ambition burst into the flame of hot, unrestrained speech, Guarda was for that moment, if she never had been before, absolutely and wholly sincere.

‘You speak of the disappointments of your striving,’ she went on bitterly and disconnectedly, but more qui-

etly; "you see I have mine. I would and will have that offered to me for which now I strive! And do you suppose that a woman makes no sacrifices of things she holds dear for a career such as mine is and will be? Do you think there are not horrid moments when the game doesn't seem worth it? But you keep on striving. I know you do. You are the kind that never gives up. I, too. I will let nothing stand between me and my complete triumph! My friends shall help me. It is one of the keenest disappointments when you find that a friend whom you have counted on will not take hold and help,"

"Why!" said Ordway, "it doesn't seem possible that any friend of yours should refuse assistance that was in his power."

"I have found that it is so. There is your chum, Billy Jameson. Only yesterday I showed him how he could be of the greatest use to me, as well as himself, and he declined so tartly that not even I had the courage to explain all I meant."

"Has Billy been here?" asked Ordway, with undiplomatic frankness, and his surprise was so evident that Guarda laughed.

"To be sure," she replied with a touch of her former gaiety, and her intense seriousness did not return that day. "He is most devoted, Billy is. Oh! he has shamed you completely. Billy has been to see me almost every day since I returned."

Ordway simply stared. He wished too late that he

had not betrayed his ignorance of Billy's movements. If Billy had wanted him to know, he would have spoken.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Guarda, all smiles now, "hasn't he said anything about it? Why! I thought you two boys told each other everything, just like a pair of school girls. How funny!"

"As a matter of fact," said Ordway, rather lamely, "we see little of each other. His work is largely at night, mine almost wholly by day, and our occupations do not cross at any point."

"Ah!" was Guarda's non-committal comment. She went on directly: "I asked you to bring him with you in the hope that in your presence I could explain my ideas fully. Perhaps you can tell him and so help me bring him to his senses."

"I will do anything I can, gladly."

"It's just this," said Guarda; "Billy is a remarkably inventive fellow, don't you think?"

"Very."

"And resourceful. I never met anybody more so," Guarda was smiling beautifully, and Ordway did not suspect that it was reminiscences that caused her lips to curl and her eyes to twinkle. "Such talent," she continued, "could be very useful to me in making my way still further up the ladder. I told you how I want an engagement at Baireuth. Now, Billy, with his newspaper connections, influence, and inventiveness, could be very helpful to that end and others to follow. So I offered him a position as my press agent. I got as far as to

tell him that I would pay him more than he is now making, when he flared up in the most provoking way and positively refused to continue the conversation. When I tried to press the subject he made remarks about boots and shoes, and hats, and opera cloaks, and a lot of nonsense."

"Perhaps," suggested Ordway, "Billy feels that there is something undignified in being a press agent."

"Then he should have let me explain. I mean to make him my manager. Acting as press agent would be merely going into training for that higher and much more lucrative position. Billy doesn't know everything. He ought to be willing to learn, and in a short time, a year at the most, I am sure he would be able to take the management of a star with confidence and success. Put it to him that way, will you, Mr. Ordway?"

"I certainly will, but if Billy has made up his mind, it will be a hard thing to move him."

"He must change his mind, and he will, when he understands that he hadn't heard the whole proposition."

Ordway reiterated his promise, and again made a move toward departure. Guarda thereupon reminded him of his promise to call again on the morrow with his manuscripts, and, before he could say yea or nay, her eyes flashed and the color leaped to her cheeks as a new thought came to her.

"Mr. Ordway!" she exclaimed, "did you never dream of opera?"

"Of writing one?" he responded. "How could I help

it? The trouble is that America offers such scant opportunities for production."

"America!" she cried; "you have the world before you! Think of it, Mr. Ordway, an opera for me! Oh! you could write such a grand one. I can feel it not only in your music, but your poems. See the unusual advantages you would be under. You would be your own librettist; your art fancies could have free swing; the play would be what you designed, not the structure of another. You would have me in mind, but that wouldn't be a sorry limitation, would it? I won't ask you to answer that, for I wouldn't like to think that you had made merely a pretty speech to a woman who fished for compliments, and you have already said nicer things to me than I ever heard from anybody else. Think of the opera, Mr. Ordway. Oh! haven't you a plot ready made that we can discuss this very minute?"

"I'm afraid not," he stammered, thrilling under the eagerness with which she presented this amazing opportunity to him. "The very thought of it bewilders me——"

"But you'd like to write an opera, wouldn't you? For me?"

"Like to! Why! Madame, no sacrifice——"

"You wouldn't need to sacrifice, Mr. Ordway. I will commission the work. Ah! I wonder I haven't thought of this before. It is a glorious idea. It should be brought out in Europe somewhere, of course—Milan, perhaps, or Vienna, and we would keep it in Europe

till its success had made America hungry for it. We would take it all over the civilized world. Think of it, Mr. Ordway. I won't ask you for a decision now, for I can understand that you will need to think, but it will be only of details. I shall think, too. I will tell you tomorrow just what kind of a part I should like to have in it. So, good-bye, and when you come tomorrow, have your head full of operatic ideas."

IV.

When I hear a man vaporizing over his love for a woman, even though I am his intimate friend, I pity her.
—The Hermit.

Ordway walked around for an hour or two in a delirious transport, suffering much pain, conscious of much joy. It had been joy as well as pain to be near her, and he persuaded himself that he had passed through the ordeal without exposing his infatuation. She had opened her heart to him, unreservedly, as he firmly believed. Ambition plainly was the mainspring of her character; well, then love could not enter. What, except his own repugnance to fostering a hopeless passion, was there to prevent him from taking such mixed pleasure as might be found in friendly association with her? Aye, and in collaboration with her!

The operatic bee buzzed loudly. How she had offered him advantages that any eager composer would have leaped to grasp! To be commissioned to write a grand opera! It was a wonderful, dazzling thought. If it had been anybody else, anybody in whom he had no shadow of personal interest, he would have felt that he was walking on air straight into the gateway of the most magnificent castle his fancy could build. But to be

commissioned by her; that was a rub. There might be a way around it. He was now making a safe living and composing a great deal in a desultory way. Why should he not go on composing, but direct his pen to the creation of a definite work on lines to be agreed on between him and her? Thus, toiling still for his living, he could feel that whatever he did for her could be regarded as the gift of his love to her, and if eventually both should profit from it in a material way, so much the better. In any event, his dignity as a lover would not be impaired.

It was somewhat in this strain that his reason ran, and he reflected over and again that he was doubly assured that this course could in no wise become injurious to her. He had thought of that possibility before. It was one of the arguments that restrained him from calling previous to her command to do so. Now, certain in his idealization of her that she would not suspect him guilty of cherishing an untoward passion, and again certain that her own ambition would blind her eyes and close her heart, he felt that the existence of that passion never could be known, and thus scandal, that hovers ever over the lives of public singers, would not venture to swoop down upon her.

Finical reasoning, perhaps, and faulty certainly, but generous.

There were other considerations to give his thoughts exercise. What about Billy? Why had Billy not mentioned at least casually that he had been to see Guarda? Ordway remembered his conjectures in Boxford; then

he thought of Philadelphia. Billy was an imperturbable liar on occasion ; had he lied about that journey to Philadelphia ? What sardonic comedy it would be if it should prove that Billy and himself were rivals in a love affair equally hopeless for both ! Ordway wished Billy would be frank with him.

They seldom met at dinner unless Ordway went down town to join Billy and some of the newspaper boys at a table d'hôte. He would have done so now, but that it was his chief desire to be alone with his friend. Accordingly he dined alone and then sat up to wait for Billy, who, by reason of his morning assignment, came home early ; that is, about midnight.

"It was impossible, Bert," said the reporter, the moment he entered. "Shooting scrap down Staten Island way. As chief crook on the paper, I was sent. Didn't get back till evening. Did you see her?"

"Certainly. I waited for a reasonable time, and thought you might run in before I got away. It was all right."

"What was all right?"

"Your absence."

"Oh ! Well?"

"She wants to do some o' my songs in recitals."

Billy nodded sagely. "She knows," he said. "I suppose, of course, that you declined to let her do so. No reason at all, you know ; just a manifestation of Ordwayism that his friends are learning to expect and endure."

"I didn't decline. I'm going to show her some pieces tomorrow."

"Incredible!"

With an extravagant affectation of solicitude, Billy went to Ordway and felt his pulse.

"Seems to be normal," he muttered; "temperature a bit high, but he'll probably get through the night. Yes, my friend, I think you'll recover. Was there any other dangerous symptom?"

Ordway smiled. It was seldom that he could not be a good audience for Billy's nonsense.

"She talks," he answered, "of commissioning me to write a grand opera."

Billy's eyes bulged and his lips parted. He said, "Ah! ah!" two or three times. Then he gesticulated as if waving his hat in the air, and his lips framed the word "Hurrah," but no sound issued. Utterly unable to find words adequate to his jubilation over what appeared to him the greatest possible good fortune for his friend, he ran to the pianoforte and pounded the keys fortissimo, bellowing the while inarticulately in some undefined tonality foreign to the chords wrenched from the helpless instrument.

The reporter was no pianist. He could accompany a coon song if the harmonies strayed not away from plain tonic and dominant, and if, perchance, his hands became tangled and he played tonic with his left and dominant with his right, his enthusiasm was merely stimulated by the results; for his was a nature too large to be dis-

turbed by little things like discords and false progressions. So, now, he thumped out cacophony and roared, at first to Ordway's great amusement, until the wrathful tenant in the flat overhead began to pound sharply on the floor.

"Shut up!" yelled Billy; "you've got to stand it. I'm composing."

Ordway pulled him away from the instrument.

"Oh! these interruptions!" groaned Billy. "Here!" and he grabbed a sheet of music paper from the pile on the book-case and spread it on the table. "Take it down," said he.

"Take what down?" asked Ordway.

"What I was playing, silly! It would be just stunning for a climax in the opera. You're welcome to it. Can't you see the scene? Bow-legged barytone binding the soprano hercine with a poisoned rope; row of girls in pink tights all around the stage; some Bowery toughs in the background, made up as brigands, and singing 'See! See!' Hero tenor leaping to the rescue from a forty-foot cliff by means of an invisible wire; foiled contralto, at right of prompt box, swallowing her love letters and singing 'Woe! Woe! Weh ist Mir!' Eh?"

"I'm afraid it's too exalted a theme for me," said Ordway; "you'd better write the opera yourself."

"Ha! and rob you of your opportunity? Not I! But I say, old man, seriously, isn't it immense? Gee! It makes up for a whole lot, that does."

"Makes up for what, Billy?" asked Ordway, cautiously.

The reporter darted a look of suspicious inquiry at his friend, but with hardly a perceptible pause, he answered, "Why, rotten assignments, drudgery, and all that sort of thing. You don't suppose I'm infatuated with my career, do you?"

"No. Guarda says she offered you a way out of it."

"Huh!"

"Why didn't you say that you had been to see her?"

"Great Scott! You hadn't led me to suspect that you cared to hear anything about the lady. You sniffed at the suggestion that we call on her together. If I had supposed you were interested in her——"

"I haven't said I was," interrupted Ordway, hastily. I wish you wouldn't be quite so loose in your statements when we are talking seriously."

"Pardon me," responded Billy, solemnly. "I will be Johnsonian henceforth."

"Were you Johnsonian in your answer to Guarda's suggestion that you become her press agent?"

"Not exactly."

"What did you tell her?"

"I believe I allowed that I was something of a liar, but I disclaimed sufficient ability for that situation."

"Nonsense, Billy! She has told me all about it. She wants you eventually to become her manager."

"Huh!"

"Doesn't that put a more attractive light on it?"

"No."

"Why not? You've often said that there's no accumulation in newspaper work. This offers opportunity for much greater income."

"I won't touch it."

"Why not?"

"My son," said Billy, "I have reasons."

He began to make ready for going to bed. Interrupting this operation, he went to the table at which Ordway sat, and leaned with both his hands upon it.

"There is just one thing that might tempt me," he said, looking his friend squarely in the eyes.

"What is it?"

"If you will accept Guarda's commission to write that opera, I will consider her proposition to me."

Ordway tried to meet Billy's gaze steadily, and failed.

So, averting his eyes, and fumbling carelessly with his papers, he said, "I think of working at an opera just as I have been dabbing at stray songs, pianoforte pieces, and the like. No commission would be necessary for that."

"Huh!" grunted Billy, and he went into his bedroom.

Thus these two played at evasion. The closest of friends, each had an experience too sacred to expose to the other, and neither was quite sure how the other stood. Each was troubled not only for himself, but for his friend.

It was with elation and eagerness that Ordway took his songs to Guarda on the following afternoon. The

event passed tranquilly. They tried the songs and debated them, selecting those that went best together and eventually agreeing upon a series that, with one song to be added, would make a satisfactory cycle. This was Guarda's suggestion, and Ordway did not oppose it, though he sat at the keyboard with corrugated brow while she gave her views. It was wholly an art argument.

"There must be a poetic climax," said she, "or, at least, such an ending as seems to be a complete conclusion. The cycle mustn't end in mid air."

"Isn't it possible to suppose," he suggested, "that the poet has not arrived at the solution of his problems?"

It should hardly be necessary to say that it was a cycle of love songs they were constructing.

"Yes," she answered, "in real life, but it won't do in art."

"Then what should be the nature of the climax?" he asked.

"Oh! I am no poet, Mr. Ordway."

"But you can suggest."

"I haven't an idea—"

Pardon me, you have. You don't need to suggest lines, or thoughts, but you can at least choose which of the two possible climaxes you prefer."

"Only two possible?"

"That's all. Happiness and tragedy. The cycle must end either with the note of joy, or that of despair."

"I see! Then, Mr. Ordway, let it be joy for once.

Don't you think there's gloom enough in the art song as it is?"

"Yes, and in the world."

"Then we'll reform it!" she cried. "You shall finish with the triumph of joy, and between us we will set a new fashion."

In the course of the call she alluded to the opera and to Billy. Ordway told her that he would undertake the opera, but asked her to wait till he could submit a scenario before discussing the matter further, and that satisfied her.

"As for Billy," he said, "you'll have to fight it out with him, yourself. I can do nothing with him."

There was little in this meeting to alloy the pleasure Ordway derived from it. He was entrenched in his conviction that his course was not only honorable, but prudent. The emotional stress of the day before seemed to have strengthened, or relieved him, and while his heart ached dully, he was not again put to confusion and torment by the touch of her hand, the engaging brilliancy of her glances as they debated, or the wealth of feeling she infused into his songs. On the whole, he enjoyed the day, and it may be said that one element contributory to his comparative content was the sense of martyrdom with which he accepted the situation.

The song of joy was written, words and music, that night, and tried by Guarda on the following day. She was delighted with it, and nothing would do but she must make an appointment for the publisher of whom

she had spoken, to meet them there the day after, to hear the whole cycle.

So, one event leading to another, they met frequently, and not once were their art discussions conducted in the presence of Signor Napoli. Guarda's husband was indeed well trained.

V.

Women, like princes, find few real friends.

—Lord Lyttelton.

If this narration were devoted particularly to the deeds and misdeeds of Billy Jameson, it would have been necessary ere now to make painful note of the recurrence of that distemper that was the despair not only of his friends, but of the victim himself. Few suspected that his ineptitude gave Billy any serious concern save for the brief period of nerve-racked remorse that must follow excessive indulgence in alcoholic liquors. He always bore himself with smiling face in the office, and wherever acquaintances were to be met. In truth, too, the mask of nonchalance and irrepressible humor that deceived the casual observer, was made to serve for his own deceit, also. He would not admit to himself, when by any strenuous effort of proud will he could help it, that he drank more than was good for him, or that he could not let liquor alone if he really chose to do so. He had not chosen, that was all. From now on his choice was made—till the next time.

It was the old story, and not to be dwelt on purposelessly, but in justice to Billy, who needs it, let it be understood that in fact, as time passed, and one excess

followed another, his periods of purely alcoholic reaction—that is, remorse—were prolonged beyond the ordinary measure, and he knew cold, calm despair. The boys in the office were not aware of it, but Ordway noticed and grieved. Now and again he would come upon Billy in their rooms, sitting moody and worn, his face deeply drawn, his attitude the picture of dejection. The reporter seldom failed to rally on the instant, and if his humor lacked its ordinary spontaneity, it was a sufficient warning that behind it lay a territory upon which not even the most intimate friend might trespass.

Ordway was not always sure what caused Billy's melancholy. Their manner of living was such that days often passed without a spoken word between them. The reporter came home habitually subsequent to midnight, by which time Ordway was regularly asleep, and if he came in at daybreak, Ordway could not know the difference; or, if he chanced to awake, be certain that it was not the tracing of lugubrious crime, or the description of a fire that had kept his friend on the go to so late an hour. By nine o'clock in the morning, Ordway was with his organ pupils at the church where he played, and as Billy seldom breakfasted until after he had reported for duty and received his afternoon assignment, it was really accident that brought them together. So, though he knew that Billy's pledge had been broken repeatedly, Ordway was far from realizing the extent to which the vice, or disease, call it which you will, had developed. He feared one thing and suspected another. It might

be that the poison of alcohol was undermining Billy's mental as well as physical force, and it might be that he, too, had become infatuated hopelessly with Guarda.

Persons whose lives run tranquilly and who know inebriety only by hearsay, may be stirred to double wonder and possibly to resentment at Ordway's attitude in the circumstances. Why, first, did he not exert himself strenuously to save his friend? Why, second, did he tolerate such behavior—that is, why did he not part from Billy in disgust and contempt, when he knew certainly as much as that the reporter had broken his solemn word?

The answer, to those who know, is wonderfully simple. Ordway did all that any man could do to arrest his friend's descent. He braved Billy's resentment, crossed the line at which the "No Trespass" was plainly set, and boldly faced him with questions that placed him between the horns of a dilemma. Either he was hopelessly in love with Madame Napoli, or he was over-drinking. Which was it? And Billy wrathfully declined to fix himself on either horn. The evidence of heavy drinking was palpable for three days thereafter. He seemed at pains to flaunt his excesses in Ordway's presence. Then, in comparative sobriety, he went, haggard and red-eyed, to Ordway and said:

"I am not hopelessly in love with Guarda. I have been drinking too much. I want to be friends, old man. If my habits are offensive to you, we'd better break away. Shall it be divorce? I can't stand for very heavy

alimony, you know," and he smiled in a ghastly way.

"It isn't the question whether it's offensive to me," Ordway replied. "It's yourself, Billy. You mustn't go to pieces."

"I'm not going to pieces. Just let me alone, Bert. Is it friends?"

Those who know will understand that after this there was nothing for Ordway but to endure. Any strenuous exertion to save his friend was calculated to speed his steps on the downward path. As to the second question: There is a friendship that women who love wot not of. It has the power to bind men together more firmly than men and women are bound together by matrimony. Ages before Damon and Pythias, it was a mighty force in the wrangling world. It is generous where love is selfish, and when love rises to that height where it endureth all things and is kind, it might with propriety change its name and call itself friendship. Such was the relation maintained by these two young men, and, having said so much for and against Billy, the narration may return to those events with which it is primarily concerned.

There had been a concert at which Guarda sang. As a matter of course, Ordway was in the audience, although his aria had not been "smuggled into the programme." Billy had planned to go with him, and they had seats together, but the reporter had made his arrangements on the chance that he could get "off" for the evening, and at the last moment a ruffian in Paterson

had the bad taste to knock a fellow ruffian on the head with a mallet, and there was a general mix-up of a thrilling character when the police arrested the murderer. The city editor sent Billy to Paterson to the end that the thrills might effectively be communicated to an eager world on the following morning. So, Ordway had a vacant seat beside him, and shortly after the concert began, Mr. Bosworth dropped into it.

Mr. Bosworth has been referred to in these pages as the regular critic for Billy's paper. It is a pity that so great a person has to figure in this history as such a lay character that it is necessary to remind the reader of his existence and station, but, when you think of it, the world's affairs include many from which truly great personalities are absent. Ordway and Bosworth had been introduced to each other, by Billy, of course, shortly after the former's arrival in town, and they were on very friendly terms. Between the first and second numbers of the concert, Bosworth said:

"I happened to meet your alter ego at the office. He asked me to say that the city editor had lassoed him and that therefore he couldn't join you."

"I presumed that was the case," Ordway responded.
"Are you alone? Then sit here, will you?"

Bosworth nodded and they gave their attention to the performance. Nothing need be said of it, save that Guarda's popular success was unequivocal, and an idea of how she pleased the elect may be gathered from a remark by Bosworth after her appearance. "The girl

can sing, can't she?" said he, to which Ordway replied that he thought so.

During the final number, which was a symphonic piece perfectly familiar to the critic, Bosworth retired to write his verdict and send it to the office by messenger. He rejoined Ordway while the audience was dispersing, and, quite as was ordinary with them on such occasions, they went to Kinkel's. This was a place highly esteemed on account of its beer, without which, of one brew or another, no musical problem ever is solved for good and all. The tribe of fiddlers was numerously represented at the tables when Ordway and the critic went in, and recruits came speedily from the orchestra that had been playing at the concert. All of them save possibly a few who had arrived from Europe within a week, knew who Bosworth was, and some of them had the privilege of bowing to the great man. A few really were acquainted with him, and these naturally drifted to his table.

The talk was general and vivacious, Ordway's share being, as usual, that of an interested and contented listener. Sometimes, at meetings like this, he was fascinated with furious debates upon moot questions in music. A man might unwittingly mention Brahms as he set down his glass, and, piff! out would burst a tirade from some other, and the whole structure of music raised by Brahms would come tumbling around them, only to be resurrected when the severe enthusiast at the other side of the table had his innings. It is said that Brahms has been killed more than a thousand times by

actual count at Kinkel's tables. Wagner, too, and all his operas have been condemned to oblivion there, and a host of performers, vocal and instrumental, have been obliterated from the face of the musical world.

But there is a broad humanity about the slaughterers at Kinkel's. If nobody is at hand to raise the dead, there is something in the cheerful atmosphere that does it, for behold, Brahms and Wagner, and others far too numerous to mention, continue to hold their own while the fiery fiddlers, and the clarinetists, and the cornists, yea, and the critics and the tympanists, continue their destructive debates. On this occasion nothing promised in the way of spicy talk until Calloway came in. It takes at least two to make a satisfactory debate, and when the gentlemen of the strings, wood, and brass, found nothing better to remark upon than the general stupidity and worthlessness of the country out of which they were getting a better living than they could have dreamed of in the fatherland, there was nobody to say them nay, for the two Americans present let the slurs pass in contemptuous silence. There was a change in the mood as soon as Calloway was seen coming in at the door and looking around for acquaintances.

This person who enters now for his short "turn" may be described most briefly as a man about town. The phrase is familiar, and the type is equally so, though it may be premised that not every man about town gives more than passing attention to serious music. According to popular apprehension, such a person is more

given to the front row in the chorus of comic opera. Calloway was far superior to the front row of the chorus. He had no end of money, judging from the fact that he went everywhere, dressed expensively, and paid his bills. It pleased him to pose as a patron of the art and to associate in a free and easy way with musicians of all ranks. Therefore, everybody who knew anybody knew Calloway, and Ordway was no exception. They had been on bowing terms for two years.

"Vell," said a fiddler, when Calloway sat down beside Ordway, after a general greeting to the company, "you haf heard her, hein?"

"Yes," he answered in his slow, superior way; "I went, I heard and saw, and was conquered."

He turned to Bosworth to explain that other engagements had prevented him from hearing Guarda at any previous appearance since her return from abroad. "She's developed amazingly," he added.

"You like her?" asked the fiddler.

"Very much. I think I should like her as much even if she couldn't sing. Fact is, she made quite an impression on me when she appeared as Siebel, some years ago. She couldn't sing then, but she had a charming figure. It's hardly possible that that should have improved as much as her voice has meantime, but I venture to assume that it hasn't deteriorated. Ask the gentlemen what they will have," he concluded, addressing the aproned waiter who stood by.

The fiddler laughed coarsely.

"You haf taste, Mr. Callovay," said he.

"That's a doubtful compliment, Schulze," drawled Calloway; "any man may pretend to taste when it's a matter of the feminine form divine. As for Guarda, I don't remember that I've ever seen such impressive—er—supports behind the footlights. Come, Ordway, what are you going to have?"

The waiter had made the round of the table and come to Ordway, beside whom he stood inquiringly.

"Nothing," said Ordway, sharply.

Calloway noticed the tone, and raised his brows in languid surprise, but it did not serve as a warning. "I make it a point never to urge a man," said he, easily; "mine will be Muenchner."

"Ach!" said one who apparently thought it discreet to flatter the wealthy rounder, "Guarda will do well now to remember her name. Ven Mr. Callovay haf impression so deep, she better haf been on her guard, yet."

"But she's married," suggested another.

"Donner! vat difference?" asked the first. "How is dot, Mr. Callovay?"

"Well," replied the rounder, "the indications are that Guarda isn't disposed to let that decrepit husband of hers stand in the way. A husband of that sort is a convenience to a woman like her, like a ghost, you know, to scare away the timid. When a man comes who has the requisite means, address, youth, and all that sort of thing, you know——"

Ordway was suddenly on his feet. He put his left

hand on Calloway's shoulder and brought his right, palm open, violently against the rounder's mouth.

"Before it gets any worse," said he, and taking his handkerchief, he carefully wiped his right hand.

Calloway, at first too amazed to speak, flushed hot and pushed his chair back from the table. Bosworth arose hastily and put his hand on Ordway's shoulder. The fiddlers stared, and at near-by tables heads were quickly turned.

"By God!" exclaimed Calloway, at last, rising, "you constitute yourself the woman's champion, do you? And do you think——"

He drew back to strike. Ordway stood where he was, but his fists were ready for what might come.

Bosworth stepped quickly to Calloway.

"For heaven's sake, Jack," he urged in a low tone, "not here, not here."

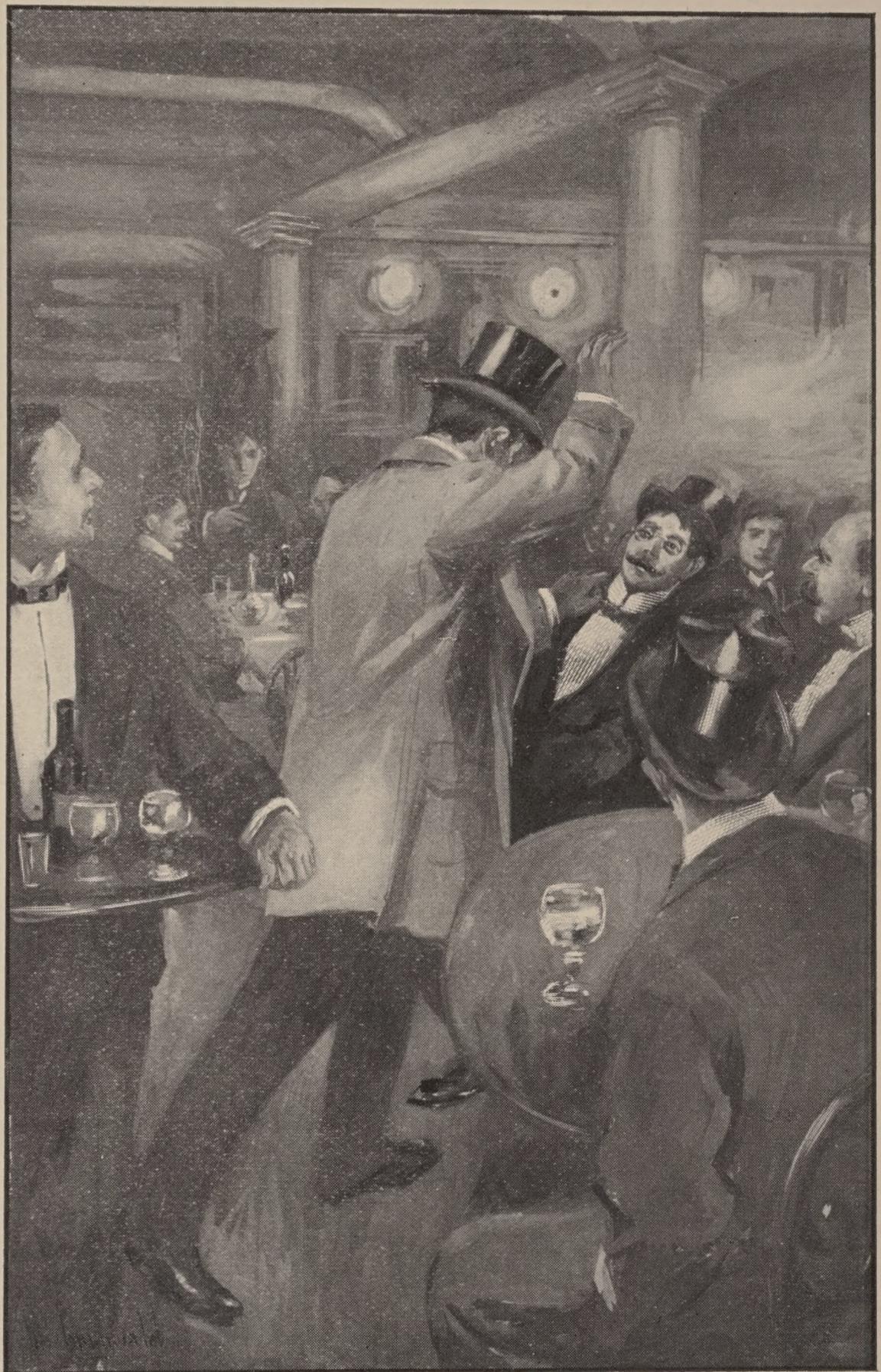
Some of the fiddlers got up and made a pretence of getting between the men. One of them ventured to push Ordway and was dropped back into his chair with disquieting suddenness for his pains. Rustic muscle as well as rustic temper was in evidence at that moment.

The manager of the place came running up. Men were leaving their tables in all parts of the room.

"Gentlemen," began the manager, but it was unnecessary to go further.

Calloway tossed a bill on the table.

"I'll return for the change," said he, and, with a savage look of inquiry at Ordway, strode to the door.



Brought his right palm, open, violently against the rounder's mouth.

See page 210.

Ordway followed, and Kinkel's patrons joined eagerly in the procession.

On the sidewalk before the place, Bosworth was pleading frantically with Calloway.

"You don't need to let it pass, man," Bosworth was saying. "I simply say that this is not the place for it. Everybody knows that you are no coward. Your reputation isn't going to suffer for a little discretion. Look at this mob!"

"Damn the mob!" retorted Calloway. "Where's the prig?"

"At your service," said Ordway, "here, now, or any time."

"Oh!" groaned Bosworth, forcibly restraining the rounder, "one would suppose you were both drunk——"

"Let me alone, Bosworth," cried Calloway. "I'm not drunk. I'm as sober as you are——"

"I know, but the appearances, man; can't you think of that? Another time and place will do as well and better"—and so on, taking swift advantage of the effect of his imputation on Calloway's sobriety.

It served to divert the rounder's attention. The night air was like a wet cloth on his brow. Bosworth's persistent interference wrought upon him. He glared around at the eager faces turned toward him in the gas light.

Bosworth appealed to Ordway.

"Go home, will you?" he said. "Do a little thinking on your own account and try to avoid scandal."

The advice came to Ordway as a shock. Of a sudden he saw the episode. Up to that instant he had been merely a part of it.

"You're right," he answered, huskily. "Mr. Callo-way knows where to find me."

He turned and went at once, hearing Bosworth's voice again appealing to Calloway to reflect and wait his opportunity.

Burning with shame, hot with indignation, and trembling with a dozen conflicting emotions, he sank into a chair when he arrived at his rooms, and put his hands to his head. Presently he took a book and opened it at a marked place. It was a treatise on the philosophy of music, a profound work, and hard reading at the best. He applied himself to this, and in the course of half an hour he had turned one page. Persistence told. It took less than half an hour to get by the next page, and he was making something like progress when Billy dashed in.

Ordway had heard him on the stairs, and he laid down the book.

Billy strode across the room, his eyes blazing with excitement, and grasped Ordway's hand, wringing it hard.

"Bully for you!" he cried; "oh! three times bully for you!"

"You've heard of it, then?" asked Ordway, sombrely.

"Luckily, yes. I was just in time to keep it out of the paper."

Ordway shuddered. Publicity, a smartly written story

under sensational headlines, had seemed to stare at him the moment when Bosworth advised him to go home.

"You didn't think of that, did you?" asked Billy.

"Not at the time, Billy. If you had been there, you would probably understand."

"Oh! What wouldn't I give if I had been able to be there! Gee! They didn't think it of you, did they? And Jack Calloway, too! Oh! It's too rich to believe."

"Don't, Billy," said Ordway. "I think it's too horrible."

"Well, it wouldn't be nice in print, I'll admit, but I guess that's safe enough now. The only bother is as to what it may lead to. We shall have to think that over, old man."

"I tried to think, and it seemed necessary to wait till you got home. Tell me how you heard about it, and exactly what you heard. I suppose the wildest exaggerations—"

"Maybe. It was this way. I was on the way home, and met Charlie Hall, of our paper. You remember him? He asked if I thought he would find you awake if he called. I said no, and wanted to know what was up. Said there was a corking story in something he'd heard at Kinkel's. All the crowd there was discussing a fracas between you and Calloway. Of course, he got particulars—"

"What did he get?" interrupted Ordway; "that's just what I want to know."

"Why! that Calloway had said something insulting

about Guarda, and that you slapped his face."

"Well? What else?"

"That was what Hall wanted to get from you. Nobody seemed to be sure what Calloway said, but the fact that you wiped your hand coolly after smashing his dirty mouth with it had not been lost as a part of the spectacle, and one man said he said one thing and another another. The Germans suppose that there will be a duel."

Ordway writhed. "Go on," he groaned.

"It seems that Bosworth got Calloway to go away, went with him, in fact, and the musicians, of course, went back to finish their beer. So did Boz, after a time. He was brimming with it then. The excitement was over, and he enjoyed telling of it. Hall got a straight account from him. He had tried to find Calloway, but failed. I persuaded him that the matter ought not to be published, and there you are."

"Yes, just at the beginning," said Ordway, bitterly.

"Possibly; and yet Calloway isn't going to tell about it. I've shut off Hall, and I've put a note in the mail to Boz. He'll get it in the early morning, and after that he'll hold his tongue. Of course, there's no stopping the musicians, but the talk may just wear itself out among them before it comes to the ears of any newspaper man."

"It may come to her."

"Well, yes, but I should think if it did she would be glad to realize that she had a friend who would resent any slur cast upon her."

"That isn't the point at all, Billy. I'm inclined to think that friendship with a woman is out of the question—a woman in public life, I mean."

"I'm afraid there's a good deal in that," admitted Billy, gravely.

"I shall never forget what Calloway said," continued Ordway, in gloomy reminiscence, and his pale face flushed. "'The indications are,' said Calloway," and here Ordway stopped abruptly. "You see, Billy," he resumed after a pause, "I've been at the hotel a good deal recently. Calloway may have had me in mind when he spoke in that indirect fashion. If he didn't, others may. There's no limit to the interpretation that men like him will place on the matter, especially now that I've cuffed him in public."

"You know how I feel about that," said Billy. "It seems like the best thing that ever happened, but it does suggest trouble."

"An end of friendship."

"I don't know," and Billy was very thoughtful; "I don't know. It won't do for you to get out of touch with Guarda. Isn't it for her to say—"

"No!" interrupted Ordway, emphatically; "you know better, Billy. It's the part of a man to safeguard his friend's reputation. I've been selfish. I did think about it, and that's what makes it all the worse. I was foolish enough to suppose that a man might do what is right and pass unchallenged."

"Well," said Billy, with a chuckle, "there's old Na-

poli. On my word, I don't see how he could be a real bar to conversation about manuscripts. Whenever I pass him I expect to hear him crackle like a sheet of paper. Why not get Guarda to stand him up in a corner, or let him smoke his cigarettes——”

“You don't know what you're talking about, Billy!”

The reporter pursed his lips and nodded several times.

“No,” said he, “I guess I don't. Probably we'd better sleep on it”; a proposition to which Ordway agreed by going to his own room.

SCHERZO.

I.

There is something pathetically comic in the desire of a good woman to see wickedness.

—The Hermit.

There was no duel. If it had been in Paris, or Berlin—but it was New York. There must have been a tremendous disturbance in Calloway's thought area, but no official observations were taken of that interesting storm center, and consequently no record can be made of it without resorting frankly to the imagination. Speculation would be easy up to a certain point.

Suppose you, for example, an American of the nineteenth century, had had your face slapped in public; what would you be inclined to do about it? Ugh! the blood boils at the thought of it! But not too fast; there is another necessary supposition. Suppose you knew you deserved it? And there we have to stop, for, with apology to you for even suggesting so much, the hypothesis is impossible. You, my dear sir, never have been heard to utter a loose word with regard to any woman. Your general respect for womanhood is so deep that even if impurity should on occasion sully your thoughts, discretion would tie your tongue.

So it is really necessary to leave Calloway to himself as an exception among men who awaits some frank analyst of his own species to interpret for us his emotions and impulses.

The storm extended its baleful influence little beyond the narrow environment of its center, making itself manifest on the rare occasions when slapper and slapped chanced to meet, by a sudden clouding and chilling of the atmosphere, a manifestation that was dissipated speedily by the prompt withdrawal of one or both of them. And that was all. If it happened that a stranger to the circumstances observed that the two men were not on speaking terms, he was quietly informed of the affair at Kinkel's, the narration always proceeding with an accompaniment of chuckles; and, oddly enough, it seemed generally to be regarded that the laugh was on Ordway. Surely there are strange ideas in the minds of the most ordinary men!

One morning very shortly after this occurrence, Ordway saw a sheet of paper tucked part way under the door of his bedroom. While he was dressing, he wondered idly how it came there, and when he was ready to go out he picked it up. There was writing on it in Billy's hand to this effect:

"You must wake and call me early, call me early,
mother dear,
For to-morrow'll be a crazy day—our Jane will then
be here."

Ordway went into Billy's room and aroused him.

"Is there anything in this nonsense?" he asked.

"What nonsense?" returned Billy, yawning. Then he glanced at the paper and lay back, shaking with laughter.

"Jane's on the way," said he.

"Jane Twitchell?"

"Yes, and Barbara Kendall. You know, they spoke of it at Boxford—that is, Jane did. Find her letter to me on the piano and read it while I'm dressing."

Jane wrote a letter too long to quote in full, but here is a part of it.

"Of course, we shall go shopping. I'm going to spend three dollars in Twenty-third street, two dollars in Sixth avenue, and fifty cents in Fourteenth street. I shall buy a box of Huyler's on Broadway somewhere, for I suppose Mr. Huyler keeps store on that famous thoroughfare. Of course, we want to see the Brooklyn Bridge, and Central Park, and Grant's Tomb. We want to ride on the Elevated, and go to a theatre, and do the Metropolitan Museum, and see the Statue of Liberty. Also we want to see Jay Gould's house, and Vanderbilt's, and Fifth avenue, and the place where Beecher preached. Also the Tribune Building, if it's the same as when Horace Greeley used to edit it—the paper, I mean; not the building, silly!"

"And, now, Billy, listen: Two old maids—for I'm one, and proud of it, and Barbara—well, Barbara's getting on, and I'm getting to have my opinion of a certain

blind fool of a man who's letting her waste her sweet-
ness on the desert air of East Wilton; I'll give him a
piece of my mind if he doesn't sit up. As I was saying,
we have no right to demand too much of a busy man
like yourself, so don't think you've got to make sacri-
fices for two unprotected females. Just plan our routes
for us and put us in charge of a messenger boy. I've
understood such a thing can be done. We're going to
stay a week if I don't get robbed or sandbagged, and
some time in that week I want you to give me—me,
understand; not Barbara—a good share of an evening.
I want to see things as they are. I want to be shocked.
Don't say a word about this, but just arrange to give a
forlorn old creature whose teeth are coming out some-
thing that she can chew over for the rest of her life.
As a newspaper man, you must know how. You set
the pace, Billy, and Jane will tag along with both eyes
open.

"And, Billy, Jane will pay. Let's have no silliness
about that. You've got uses enough for the money
you earn. I haven't earned a cent, and I've got more
than I know what to do with. It's just heavenly to
blow it in! I spent a dollar and a quarter yesterday
for a pair of stockings, and sixty-five cents for a hair
ribbon! Oh! there's no end to my going it! At all of
which I don't doubt that you are laughing brutally; but
you don't know what it is to be a penniless old maid
and darn your twenty-five-cent stockings till there's
nothing left of the original article."

Jane did not say so, and Ordway did not need to be told that this proposed pilgrimage had been the subject of infinite discussion in East Wilton; that Jane and Barbara, and Mrs. Kendall, had debated it generally and particularly for weeks, and that it was altogether the greatest event that ever had happened, far exceeding the bi-centennial celebration of the First Church; but city friends had not been invited to participate in the preliminary debates, and they were notified only when Jane's mind was fully made up. That done, and the trunks packed, Jane had written.

Ordway looked again at the date line and the first paragraph. Billy had found the letter at the office the day before. The pilgrims, then, were due to arrive that day at three o'clock.

It was rather sudden, this visitation, this lifting and transplanting of his peaceful past into his turbulent present. At first Ordway wished they had chosen another time, and it was not until a day or two had passed that he came to see that Fate and Jane had got together for some measure of good purpose. He had been mentioned in the letter, directly as well as indirectly, and it was clear enough that the women really anticipated a good deal of attention from him. He would be glad to give it, certainly. It would be a pleasure to show the great city to these wondering, appreciative strangers. His memory dwelt with something like sadness on a time when he had dreamed of introducing Barbara to the bewildering sights of the town. That had

seemed such a happy event in prospect. Now it was different; but he supposed he should enjoy their wonderment in an impersonal way, as a Cook's man might when he took out his first party of tourists.

Meantime, as he sat near the window thinking these things, Jane's letter held loosely in his hand, a series of grunts and impatient ejaculations issued from Billy's bedroom. They came to a climax in a fervent "Damn!" and then a small object flew through the half-opened door and fell with a tinkling into the pianoforte. Next there was a sound of bureau drawers pulled open and their contents hurriedly rummaged.

"Funny, isn't it?" called Billy, during this process.

"Which?" replied Ordway, indifferently; "Jane's letter, or the refractory collar-button?"

Billy did not reply for a moment. There was another naughty word, and then he came into their sitting-room, clad in shirt and trousers. A preposterously high collar was fastened at the back of his neck, but the front of his shirt was open and the collar ends scraped against his cheeks. He looked worried.

"It was the last I had," he said. "Where'd it go?"

"Into the piano," Ordway told him.

Billy bent over the instrument and looked. He saw the button he had thrown away, and tried to thrust his fingers between the wires and get it. His fingers were too thick, or the wires were too close together, which amounted to the same thing.

"Got any spare buttons, Bert?" he asked.

"I regret to say I haven't. I discovered a shortage yesterday, but forgot to get any."

"Then I've simply got to have this one. Isn't Jane a——" Searching for the lost collar-button and language at the same time, he found neither, and concluded helplessly, "Isn't she?"

"She seems to be hungering for some sort of excitement," said Ordway, "and I don't know that I wonder. She's all energy and animation, and she doesn't get much outlet at home."

"Well, by jiminy! we'll have to stir her up, eh?"

"I don't see that I'm included in that part of the programme."

"No; but you must be on, you know. I shouldn't have half the fun out of it I hope for if I couldn't tell you about it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet. Confound that button!"

He drew back from the instrument, scratched his head, and looked around the room.

"I have it!" he said, and went to Ordway's table, where he rolled a sheet of paper into a slender wand. One end of this he stirred in a pot of mucilage and returned with it to the pianoforte.

"Say," he went on, as he fished for the button, "who is Jane talking about when she speaks of some fellow who hasn't the good sense to snap up Barbara?"

For once, Ordway lied glibly and promptly.

"I don't know," he said,

"I wonder," murmured Billy, dabbing at the button, "if it is George Wheelock? He hasn't settled down yet, has he?"

"I think not."

If any less important operation had been engaging the major part of Billy's attention, he might have remembered the childhood intimacy between Herbert Ordway and Barbara Kendall, and have traced a connection between it and Jane's Sibylline utterance; but just then the lost button adhered to the gummed end of his paper wand, and he drew it forth with a satisfied "A-a-h!" He retired with it to his bedroom, and gave his mind mainly to planning how he might give Jane Twitchell a "hot" time."

II.

No solemn, sanctimonious face I pull,
Nor think I'm pious when I'm only bilious.

—Hood.

It was impracticable for Billy to meet the women on their arrival, and Ordway therefore went to the station alone. Much to his chagrin, he could not overcome a sense of dread as the hour of three approached. It was the last thing he wanted them to suspect, and accordingly he set his will to work so to draw his face and frame his remarks that they should feel that they had been welcomed. His difficulties in this regard vanished speedily after the train came in.

Standing at the gate through which the incoming passengers filed, and looking down the long platform, he saw a red-capped man with a valise in each hand. Behind him marched Jane, her lips pressed hard together, her eyes flashing. Barbara walked demurely beside her. Jane saw Ordway while yet she was a great way off, and waved her parasol at him, lowering it abruptly and turning her head with a jerk toward Barbara, who apparently had protested against such an outlandish greeting; but Ordway waved his hat joyously in re-

sponse, and presently he was shaking hands with the pilgrims.

"Scared to death!" gasped Jane; "both of us scared silly! Here! stop that man with the red cap! He's got my best dress and my toothbrush!"

She belied her declaration of timidity by darting after the porter and hooking him on the arm with the crook handle of her parasol.

"Whoa!" said she. "You kindly wait a jiffy. When I say geddap it will be time to go ahead."

The porter halted and grinned sheepishly. All who were passing smiled. Ordway looked at Barbara, and they both laughed. Whatever tension there might have been between them was broken.

"I suppose," suggested Ordway, "that you will want to be piloted to a good boarding-house?"

Jane sniffed contemptuously.

"No, sir!" she retorted. "We're going to a hotel, and we're going in a hack if we have to walk home. Shall I give that man our trunk checks? Is he honest? You can pick out our hotel for us from this list. The dominie gave it to me. I think he tried to put us off with old ladies' homes, but you'll know. We want to be where there's something going on—people going up and down the front steps, wagons forever passing, and I wouldn't mind if there was a fire engine house across the road. Land!" and she threw up her hands in a gesture of resignation; "I've been running the train for five mortal hours, and I'm about ready to give up and

let a man take hold. Go ahead, Bert. We'll do what you say and be as meek as kittens in a dark basket."

Ordway looked over the list she gave him, and presently had the women in a cab.

"Say!" said Jane, as he got in with them, "will we go anywhere near the Bowery?"

"Not this time," he answered, laughing with unaffected mirth; "but I'll take you there before you leave the city."

"You?" cried Jane. "You never go to the Bowery, do you?"

"Often, to get music paper. One of the largest music houses in town is just at the head of the Bowery."

"La, me!" said Jane. "How disappointing!"

"I actually think," said Barbara, "that Jane will be sorry if we are not attacked by footpads, or burnt up in the hotel, or if something dreadful doesn't happen."

"New York must be what it's cracked up to be or I'll disown it," Jane declared.

As they rolled along, Ordway answered their questions—or rather Jane's, for Barbara looked and listened for the most part. Jane inquired for Billy, asked "What's that?" at every street crossing, and nearly broke her neck with her first glimpse at the Waldorf-Astoria when they passed that lofty building.

"Jane!" said Barbara, at this point; "what will people think?"

"They'll think we're country," Jane retorted, "and I don't care. My stars! I wonder how it would feel to

be on the top floor of that hotel and know that there was a fire in the cellar?"

And so it went until Ordway had deposited them in a hotel, when he left them to their own devices until near evening. Then he returned with Billy to take them to a French restaurant for dinner. Jane attached herself to Billy in a matter-of-course way, and Ordway walked with Barbara.

The conversations of the pairs run as might be expected. Barbara, awhirl with the infinitely long journey, and bewildered by a multitude of first impressions, remarks upon the noise, confusion, and the endless processions on the sidewalks; but that is nothing, Ordway tells her; she must wait and see the streets when they are really lively. And these fearfully high buildings, she gasps, hardly daring to look up, for, unlike her traveling companion, she shrinks from attracting attention—how do human beings dare to live and toil so far from the ground? Ah, these are pigmy, he assures her, with the large condescension that fits the three-year-old resident of the city so nicely, and that must be so impressive to the country cousin; wait till she sees lower Broadway. Why! the buildings are so high down town that the streets look like slits cut with a knife in a great cheese. She cannot take it all in yet; it seems confusing—wonderful, of course, but almost terrible. Think of all these persons passing, and passing, and jostling, and not one of them greeting another with a pleasant "good evening." There is something inhuman about it.

His smile is calm and reserved, such as one bestows upon a child who inquires about the Almighty's domestic arrangements; it takes years to realize that in the city the individual is submerged, years to comprehend the place, and even then one is always discovering something new. She wonders how even the old residents remember to turn at the right corners, they all look so much alike, and, with infinite pains to make his action perfectly patent, he turns into a side street while looking elsewhere and discoursing on matters at a distance.

Jane grips Billy's arm eagerly, and wants to know, *sotto voce*, if he has considered the private request in her letter? She meant it, every word. He has given it prayerful consideration, and, with seductive hesitation, wonders whether he ought to gratify her? She might regret it. She guesses tartly that she can take care of her own sensibilities; she hadn't appealed to him for moral or spiritual guidance; when she is in need of that sort of thing she knows where to apply for it, and it won't be of a New York newspaper man; huh! and she gives his arm an impatient shake. Well, but a man, especially a newspaper man who has to see so much that is deplorable, knows in advance what the scenes are—which, with another shake, is exactly why she besought his assistance. Does he take her for a weak-minded sentimentalist? for a Miss Prim? No, far from that, but seriously, he cannot forget that she is a woman, and a woman's eyes—whereupon she stops short and shakes him, to the astonishment of chance observers and his

overwhelming joy, and demands if he is going back on her! Billy! is he? No, with monumental reluctance, not if she's so confounded headstrong and obstinate, but if she is sadly shocked, the consequences must be on herself; he washes his hands of any responsibility. Then it's settled, and she is in vast good humor; she guesses she's old enough to assume her own responsibilities, and a moment later they are in Guttin's with that genial restaurateur beside their table, to be sure that M'sieur Zhamson and his friends are well served.

To the women, eager for novelty and fresh impressions, that modest dinner and the long walk up brilliant Broadway afterward was a dream of delight. To Billy, who had to cut part of the walk to cover an assignment, it was rich in the fun he extracted from Jane at the moment, and richer in his rising anticipations. To Ordway, it proved the most grateful relief. His over-sensitive and over-wrought temperament found repose in the suggestion of broad fields and deep forests that came with Barbara to the city. Time and again in his verses he had called for peace! peace! and, all unaware of it, during the brief evening, it came to him. Later, when he had said good-night, and was walking homeward, he began to realize that he had had a good time, and he was quite inclined to castigate himself for retaining capacity for anything but sorrow.

We must not get out of patience with Ordway; he was very young, and he was sore afflicted with what his chum called Ordwayism, which, interpreted, means that he was

a supreme egotist. He was not altogether singular in this world of commonplace persons; there are many like him, and some of them are worth saving, much as we may impatiently wish that they were gifted with a little less imagination, or a little more leavened by sense of perspective.

On the following day, Ordway took the women on an extended excursion, cutting some lessons in order to be their guide. The trip comprehended many of the sights that Jane was hungering for, the homes of the millionaires, the Bridge, Central Park, and so forth, and at the end of it, she confessed herself clean beat out. She didn't want to see another blessed thing; she wouldn't even go to a window if a fire engine passed; Barbara and Herbert had better go to a theatre, or a concert, whereupon Barbara rather hastily announced that she also was tired, and it was agreed that the theatre must wait. It was understood, further, that shopping should be the next matter to demand attention, and that the women were confident they could manage by themselves. So, then, a day passed during which Ordway did not meet them, and it was in this interval that he realized that their visit was somewhat fortunate; with its interruptions to his regular work, it was serving to keep him from calling on Guarda. He had no definite engagement with the singer, but he had been running in with such frequency that he knew she would notice his absence. He wondered if she would hear of the affair at Kinkel's and apprehend his attitude?

During the stay of the pilgrims, both Billy and Ordway looked in on them frequently, advising, planning, escorting when they could do so, and enjoying Jane's comments and Barbara's quieter appreciation. The four contrived to go to a theatre together, and Ordway planned a similar evening at a concert where Guarda was to sing. Barbara was all enthusiasm over this, but Jane glanced significantly at Billy.

"I've heard Guarda," she said. "She can sing better than anybody in East Wilton, but I didn't come to New York to hear what I can hear in Boxford."

"But I would come all the way to New York to hear Guarda again," cried Barbara. "Isn't she one of the very great singers, Herbert?"

"I think she is," he answered, "but I don't want to influence your programme."

"You couldn't suggest anything better for me. Now, Jane, dear——"

"Don't 'Jane-dear' me!" interrupted the old maid, who was proud of it; "run along to your concert, if you want to. Billy and I——"

"That's it!" put in Billy, taking his cue, suddenly; "Jane and I will take in something more to our taste."

"Billy and I are going to frivol," said Jane, placidly, smoothing out her skirt and folding her hands.

Barbara's eyes opened wide. This, evidently, was the first intimation she had had of Jane's devious desires. She looked from the spinster, who was affectedly serene,

to the reporter, whose eyes were twinkling, and then to Ordway, who avoided her glance.

"Herbert," said she, "what are they up to, these two?"

"I like that!" exclaimed Billy, ruffling. "These two! What do you think of that, Jane?"

"It doesn't disturb me," was the reply. "I've long thought you and I were made for each other."

"They're going to elope!" cried Ordway, who knew all about it.

"Oh! this is so sudden!" gasped Jane, and then all four burst out laughing.

"I don't care," said Barbara; "you two are up to some fun that you haven't told us about. I want to be in it."

"Horror!" cried Billy.

"Child," said Jane, severely, "you are going to be good and hear Guarda, and that settles it."

So it did, though there was a lot of good-humored disputation about it which came near to making Ordway uncomfortable, for he could not but suspect that Barbara was resisting the proposition that she go to a concert with him alone. When, however, by prearrangement with Billy, he invited Barbara to go with him upon a round of the Fifth avenue picture galleries, she consented eagerly, and they set off without delay. It was then afternoon, and this device was to enable Billy and Jane to plan their evening's excursion. The reporter had obtained the whole day and evening "off"

on the plea to his city editor that he had a scheme for a lively Sunday story that might be developed; he wasn't sure, but he would like to try it; and as Billy had been behaving himself unexceptionably for several days, the tyrant of the city room had consented.

Ordway thought he never had seen Barbara so gay as she was upon that afternoon. He attributed her demeanor to the infection of Jane's lively humor. The fresh color of the country was high on her cheeks, there was animation in her eyes, and mirth upon her tongue; that depression which the city so often imposes at first on gentle natures had worn away with a few days' familiarity, and now she saw humor and humanity in the spectacle. She grasped its details and set them in some sort of relation to the whole in a way that was impossible for a day or two after her arrival. She turned her head to avoid laughing in the very faces of the liveried flunkies at carriage doors, she exclaimed over art objects displayed in windows before which she paused, and she stood breathless with rapture before the paintings in the galleries they visited.

Once she turned from long contemplation of an Inness landscape to Ordway, who stood patiently, and, for that matter, contentedly, by, for he, too, had soul for that manner of art, and she said: "Oh! I am having such a good time!" in a low tone that fluttered with the intensity of her happiness; and the quick deepening of the color on her cheeks told no other story to her escort.

than that she was appreciative of the city's treasure of wonders.

They had dropped into several art stores, pursuing no definite plan, but following the fancy of the moment, guided by the window display, or the odd promise that some unpronounceable foreign name over the door might give, which everybody knows is the most delightful and satisfactory way to conduct a quest for pleasure, and they had come, toward the end of the afternoon, to an establishment that differed from the others only in the details of its display. In a room at the back, screened by draperies so that the sun could not reach it, and ingeniously lighted to the end that it might, even at noon, have all the atmosphere of an evening view, was a painting before which stood a group of spectators. It attracted Barbara's attention at once, but she waited until the spectators had withdrawn, and then went before it, leaving Ordway intent upon the study of a Corot.

"Herbert!" she called, and as he drew quickly near, "See! it's Guarda!"

She could not fail to observe the flush that leaped to his too responsive brow, or the trouble that clouded his eyes; and she turned again to the portrait, her own eyes deep with admiration and wistfulness.

"I had forgotten," he said, with halting assumption of composure that he did not feel, "that it was here—that is, I knew of the portrait, but did not know where it was exhibited."

"You have seen it before, then?"

"Not since it was finished."

He thought how easy and natural it should be to say that he had accompanied Guarda to the studio where she had sat for the artist, but he could not command his tongue to say more.

"She is very beautiful," said Barbara.

The portrait showed the singer in concert costume, and it had been her own fancy to have it painted in such a way that artificial light should make it most effective. Ordway knew that the painter had asked the privilege of displaying the work in a public gallery for a time, and that Guarda had consented with as much graciousness as if there were no incidental advertisement for herself to be derived from the exhibition; but he had not known that the portrait was to be set up in this particular place. If he had known, he would have guided Barbara away from it. And yet, why should she not look upon the picture of a beautiful woman, whom she was to hear in the evening? A guilty conscience alone could answer the question, and that was in Ordway's possession.

There are human beings, even in this materialistic day, to whom temptation is guilt in itself.

Barbara could not, or at all events did not, take her eyes from the portrait for some minutes. She looked at it very gravely, and if she saw somewhat beyond the canvas, there was no way for Ordway to know it, for she spoke not. Ordway gazed at it, too. This lifeless presentation could not smile him out of countenance. He

could feast his eyes upon this as he could not upon the reality. It was only when she was upon the concert platform and he indistinguished in the audience that he could concentrate his gaze upon her, and then his view was shared by a thousand; here he was alone; he had her to himself save for Barbara, and the country girl almost faded from his consciousness. So absorbed were they both that neither noticed the rustling of skirts and light steps that came to halt just behind them. At last, "She is very beautiful," repeated Barbara, with a note of sadness that she tried to suppress and that he failed to observe, and she turned to go. Then she gave a little gasp of surprise, and, her back to the portrait, looked into the laughing eyes of the living Guarda.

"So Mr. Ordway," said the singer, holding out her hand with that unaffected cordiality of which she was past mistress, "though you desert me you still pay homage to my shrine. That is reparation to some extent, I confess; but how you can be content with a counterfeit presentment when the original is at command might be cause for resentment. You must pardon this unconventional behavior," she added, quickly. "I came in to see if the portrait had been placed to suit me, and seeing you both so intent in criticising it I could not resist the temptation to hear your comments."

Ordway presented Barbara, adding, "We are booked to hear you this evening."

"Good!" said Guarda, "I shall have to be on my mettle to pay for the very sweet thing you said about my

picture," and she beamed upon Barbara quite as delightfully as if the country girl had been a man.

"We were not criticising," said Barbara; "at least, I was not. That is beyond me."

"But Mr. Ordway was, I am sure. He's a terrible fellow, Miss Kendall! Never speaks anything but the truth, and the whole truth; and now tell me, both of you," and she went on with a number of finical questions about the lighting and draping of the picture.

In the course of the conversation it came out naturally that Barbara was a stranger in town, and Guarda not only prettily rebuked Ordway for not calling with her, but pressed an invitation upon them to breakfast with her on the following morning. Ordway looked inquiringly at Barbara.

"I should like to very much," she responded, faltering a little, "if there is time. We start for home at noon."

"We?" said Guarda, elevating her brows.

"My cousin and I," Barbara explained. "I ran away from her to see the galleries, but we are visiting the city together."

"You must bring your cousin, too, of course!" cried Guarda. "Your train goes at noon? Well, then, we'll breakfast at ten, and you shall go from me to the train. Is it agreed?"

The engagement was made, and after some further light talk Guarda returned to her carriage.

"Shall we go on?" asked Ordway; "there is——"

And he named another store famous for its constant display of fine paintings.

"No, thank you, Herbert," Barbara responded; "I have seen so much that I am quite tired."

And all the way back to the hotel she was singularly silent and pensive. Ordway did not notice it. He was in the same mood.

III.

In every deed of mischief he had a heart to resolve,
a head to contrive, and a hand to execute.

—Gibbon.

The four dined together again that evening, and Ordway and Barbara went directly from the restaurant to the concert. Billy escorted Jane to her hotel, left her there and hastened to his rooms, returning shortly with a bundle that he would not consign to the care of a bellboy on the way to her parlor. She was waiting for him on the qui vive with excitement.

“Courage still firm, Jane?” he asked, when he went in and the door was closed.

“Have you got ‘em there?” she returned, pointing to the bundle.

He handed it to her.

“You’ll find the shoes too big for you,” said he. “That’s necessary, as I suppose you can see. Better cram some newspaper into the toes to make ‘em keep from flopping.”

“Hm—hm!” she responded between pressed lips. Could it be that her courage was oozing?

“Of course,” Billy added, deprecatingly, “it isn’t too late to back out. You know what I’ve said——”

Her eyes snapped as she turned upon him. She had started to her chamber.

"Who's said anything about backing out?" she demanded.

"Well, I did."

"Then don't say it again. Sit down and read the 'Post,' It won't take me forever, I guess."

"Do your hair up in a tight bunch on top of your head, Jane," he said, warningly, and then ducked behind the newspaper. It was his penalty for this escapade that he had to keep his face straight, and never had he been so sorely tried.

Jane slammed the door behind her and was gone an unconscionably long time, or so it seemed to Billy, who was in perspiring apprehension lest she weaken at the last moment. Maybe she did have qualms and tortures of hesitation, but hers was the stern stock that two centuries ago compelled bleak New England to glow with wheat and corn, and this descendant was not one to look back after putting hand to the plow. So, eventually the door reopens, and—

Oh! Jane, Jane! If this should ever get to East Wilton! For there you are, the strangest figure of a man, from high-crowned derby hat to shoes that will flop in spite of paper wadded into the yawning toes. Truly, you are a sight, Jane Twitchell; that long, loose over-coat becomes you ill, if it does conceal the greater part of you; you shouldn't clasp your hands in front, for a man's hips are no place for his elbows; your neck is not

the least bit manly, for all there is a hard, high collar around it; and that tie never was put on by a man; neither is there manly determination upon your firmly pressed lips, nor masculine wrath in the flashing of your eyes as you see Billy doubling up helplessly and turning away his head that he may the sooner control his shameless mirth.

"It ain't fair, Billy Jameson!" cried Jane, stepping one pace toward him, and then halting in conscious embarrassment.

"That's right, Jane—that's right," he said, sobering hastily, but not because his conscience smote him. He was afraid, that was all—afraid that ridicule might keep her faltering steps from straying beyond this room. "If I were in your garb," he added, "it would be just as surprising, you know. To a stranger, and that's all that counts, I think you would carry it off quite well. But let's see you walk."

She minced across the room, and Billy rubbed his lips furiously while her back was turned.

"Can't you make your stride a little longer?" he suggested, "and step more firmly——"

"How can I step firmly with these mudscows on?" she asked, sharply; but she tried, nevertheless, and again crossed the room, fully doubling her ordinary stride.

"That's a good deal better," said Billy, gravely, "and it will do very well if you'll only drop your hands to your side, this way, see?" and he set her an example.

"I'm afraid I shall be forever clutching at the skirts of this coat," said she, imitating patiently.

"Lord! That won't do! We must have something to occupy your hands with if that's the danger. Take an umbrella in one hand, and here"—there was a neatly wrapped parcel on the table—"this in the other."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Jane, "that's a present for Mrs. Kendall."

"Never mind. No harm will come to it. People will think it's a box of cigars."

Jane made the circuit of the room several times with the umbrella and parcel, and Billy nodded approvingly.

"It's a good deal better than you think," said he.

"I hope so," she responded, earnestly. "Say, Billy, does a man get so he can walk without consciousness of his—his extremities?"

The reporter pursed his lips and rubbed his chin. "Well," he answered, thoughtfully, "I don't realize that I have a head unless it aches——"

"I wasn't referring to that extremity," she snapped, "and you knew it, impudence!"

"I beg your pardon——"

"You needn't. Whatever happens to-night it's my fault. I've said so, and I stick to it. Let's make a start if you think I'll do. The start will be the worst part of it, I guess. Won't the hotel people suspect?"

"We'll avoid them by going down the stairs."

They did so, and fortune favored them, for they met only one person, a bellboy, who was going up three

steps at a time, and he was so busy about it that he did not look at them.

Jane was vastly encouraged. "I do believe I shall hit it off all right," she whispered, and mechanically she transferred the parcel to the hand that also held the umbrella, and grasped Billy by the arm. Then she thought, and back went the parcel to its proper hand. Thus in manly independence she came to the side entrance and a moment later was drawing a breath of relief in the friendly shelter of a hansom that Billy had waiting for them.

They steered, of course, straight for the Bowery. Jane had seen this thoroughfare from the windows of an elevated train by daylight, and its tameness had come nigh to driving her back to East Wilton instanter; but she was sure that in the lurid glow of artificial light it would justify its repute. It proved so because luck was still with them. They saw a policeman interfere in a drunken brawl near Houston street and march a staggering prisoner away. Billy exulted. In all his professional wanderings in quest of news from the Bowery he never had seen so much of a fracas there. Under his orders the hansom went slowly till the little scene was ended by the dispersing of the crowd. Jane was all eyes.

"That prisoner," said Billy, "is one of the most notorious cutthroats in the city."

"Thank goodness they got him before we went any further!" exclaimed Jane.

"There are others, though."

"You needn't try to scare me, Billy Jameson. I'm in for it, and I wouldn't run if a whole army of thugs upset the cab."

He took her first to the Atlantic Garden, where they found a place in the gallery next the rail and looked down upon hundreds of contented Germans with their wives, and in some instances their children, drinking beer with remarkable moderation and listening to the women's orchestra. Jane was fascinated until her questions brought out the fact, that Billy could not successfully disguise, that the place was not a hotbed of wickedness.

"Pshaw!" said she; "this has its interest, of course, as a phase of life that hasn't been imported into East Wilton, but we might have brought Barbara here. Can't you show me anything better?"

"Worse, you mean."

"Yes, I do. What have I got these ridiculous things on for if I'm to sit like a prim old maid in such and see honest Dutch fraus hobnobbing with their husbands?"

"Mebbe," said he, reflectively, "mebbe some of them haven't got their husbands with them. That's worth thinking of when you're hunting for scandal."

"No sarcasm, Billy, or back I go this minute."

He took her to a cheap "museum" near by, with some trepidation on his part lest her palpable disguise attract attention; but by keeping close beside her and dropping her into a chair at every possible opportunity

this danger was avoided and they escaped without adventure. Jane was again disappointed. She had not been shocked. Of boisterous revelry, the giddy whirl of riotous living, she had seen nothing.

"I'm just giving you progressive glimpses of the city's lower life," he protested. "We'll go now to a place where it really won't do to inquire about your neighbors."

The cab was still in commission, and they went up-town. On that night the Academy of Music was devoted to a ball, the very mention of which would have brought a blush to the cheeks of those who knew, if it were not for the melancholy fact that such persons had lost the gift of blushing. Billy looked to this event for a climax, the excursion into the depths of the Bowery being but preliminary and time-killing, for the ball was not scheduled to begin until a late hour. If it had been the annual firemen's ball in East Wilton, and the place the town hall, the festivities would have been in an advanced stage when Jane and her escort arrived. As it was, the ancient temple of musical high art presented a lively spectacle to her unaccustomed eyes. There was a throng of carriages at the curb, a throng of men and women pouring in at the doors. Billy had the forethought to order his cabman to wait where he could be approached readily, and, with an unnecessary caution to Jane to step firmly, led her into the gay current. Glancing slyly, he saw her lips pressed hard together and her eyes flashing. She caught the glance.

"This is it, Billy," she said, in an aspirate tone of deep satisfaction; "it's all right. I'm sure this is it."

Somewhat to her discomfiture, she was obliged to surrender her umbrella and parcel at the cloak room; but her apprehension was relieved when Billy told her that all men were required to wear masks until midnight. He gave her one of two flimsy articles that he bought on the spot, and she promptly put it on, concealing her eyes and a part of her nose. Thus, like a hunted ostrich that conceals its head under a leaf, she proceeded with a cheerful sense of security. The understrappers at the door were for making her check her precious overcoat and necessary hat also, but Billy whispered briefly to the ticket-taker, who gave Jane an indifferent glance and allowed her to pass. The presence of women in one or another form of masculine disguise was not without precedent at this function.

Billy's plan for this part of the escapade was elaborate. It included first a general tour of the main floor, then a view of the grand march and subsequent revelry from a box, and later a visit to the supper-rooms, with such adventures as might befall there in the natural course of events. Alas, for the frailty of human plans! They had not traversed more than half the main floor when they came upon a group of men who were elbowing each other and craning their necks in such evident manifestation of belief that they were having a good time that Jane instinctively paused to see what it might be that interested them. Billy knew, and he quaked a

bit; but he remembered Jane's desire, and did not hold her back. It was not easy to get a comprehensive view of the entertainment there in progress. The men stood thick, and were not at all disposed to make generous room for newcomers; but after a moment Jane saw an inverted silk hat suddenly raised above the heads in front of her, and following it the toe of a small, shapely foot. It was but a flash, and she comprehended but dimly the gratified "Ahs!" and handclapping that followed. Then, through some unforeseen, unpremeditated movement of the group, a lane appeared in the mass, at the end of which was an elegantly appareled woman of high color and sparkling eyes. She had both hands on her skirts, and she was looking intently at the inverted silk hat that a man held before her at the level of his own face. Whisk! up went the foot again; there was a fleeting display of such hosiery as would have made the mere suggestion of a darning-needle seem a crime, a light thud, and away went the hat sailing over the heads of the crowd.

A gasp from Jane and a frantic clutch at Billy's arm. All the pent-up conservatism of generations of quiet lives in East Wilton, all the unconscious dignity of the woman's nature, revolted.

"Billy," said she, "which way is the door? I'm all turned round."

"You don't mean that you want to go?" he returned.
"That's only a professional dancer hired by the manage-

ment to make things lively while the crowd is gathering. The real fun hasn't begun yet."

"I don't call that dancing!"

"Well, I don't think it's called dancing in the New York vocabulary, either, but——"

"Which way is the door?"

"This way," and he led her back across the floor. He was disappointed, amused, and, to tell the whole truth, relieved. It did occur to him that this harum-scarum escapade might well terminate without a view of the orgies in the supper-rooms. He tried to persuade himself that his words of mock warning had been intended seriously. Jane bolstered up the effort.

"I'm an old fool!" she snapped. "You're all right, Billy. I stand by what I said. You warned me; but there's no fool like an old fool. Only get me out of this now as soon as you can."

They rescued their belongings that had been stored in the cloak room, made a present of their masks to the man from whom they had been bought, and started side by side to stem the incoming tide of patrons. At the moment it was a noisy crowd that surged into the building. A party of young men and women who had taken time by the forelock and primed for the occasion at dinner was making a rush for the main door, somewhat upon the plan of a football "wedge." They found it easy to push by some of those who were going in the same direction, but the pair of

outgoers impeded them momentarily and caused an ebullition of excitement.

"Say!" bawled a young fellow with a flushed face, who was pushing a girl along at the point of the wedge, "fun's not begun yet. Whatcha goin' away for?" and, the better to emphasize his reproof, he reached forth and knocked off Jane's hat. The attention of all around was directed to her, and all saw the tight coil of hair on the top of her head. There was a chorus of derisive laughter, for in that crowd perception was quick to grasp the situation. Early departure and the scandalized, as well as terrified, expression on Jane's face told the story. With mischievous instinct the wedge turned toward her. A brief moment of hustling followed, good natured, perhaps, but the humor of it was not relished by Jane, neither by Billy. His own lips were tightly pressed as he drove his fist smash into the red face of him who had knocked off her hat. The violent manoeuvre made a slight gap in the crush, into and through which Billy forced Jane, half-carrying her down the steps and along the walk to the waiting cab.

"Jove!" he exclaimed, as he helped her in, "that wasn't on the programme! Get a move on, cabby, before the police wake up."

The driver had seen enough to understand the advisability of haste, and the cab speedily rolled away from the neighborhood. Billy looked apprehensively at Jane. The flash of a street lamp revealed her sitting rigid, staring straight ahead.

"You're not hurt, I hope," said he.

"No," she answered, "not bodily. I shall wish I had that hat when we get to the hotel."

That was all she said on the way back, and Billy made acquaintance with grief. His climax had proved a disaster, wiping out all the fun, past and prospective, of the adventure. They gained her parlor by the way they had gone from it, and with as little difficulty. "Come back for these things," said she; "I want to see the last of them."

He went down and dismissed his cabman. After idling for some minutes he returned to the parlor. Jane was herself again, in apparel, but not quite in manner.

"You needn't disturb yourself, Billy," she said. "You warned me, and I took the reins. I won't go back on what I said. Take these things away now. I'm going to bed. If Barbara should come in and think me awake I should have to tell her; I just couldn't help it. By morning I shall be able to hold my tongue. See that you hold yours."

IV.

But optics sharp it needs, I ween,
To see what is not to be seen.

—John Trumbull.

“Sh!” said Barbara, softly, returning from a peep into Jane’s chamber; “she is asleep.”

“Good night, then,” returned Ordway; “I’ll call at half-past nine to-morrow.”

He was glad that it was so. The concert had put his nerves on the rack. He felt that there was something absurd and unreasonable in his sensitiveness; but there had been small content in sitting beside one whom he had loved, and hearing her sing whom now he did love. If Jane and Billy had been along it might have been different. He would not have suggested the concert if he had known that the matter would turn in this way. According to his understanding of the plan, the escapade of Jane was to take place at a much later hour. And to-morrow he must be with them again, an ordeal he would willingly avoid, but he saw no way in good sense or courtesy to do so.

Billy was abed, but not asleep, when he arrived at their rooms. Somewhat to his surprise, the reporter

was not chuckling reminiscently over his adventures with Jane. Ordway asked two or three perfunctory questions about it; but he was not deeply interested, and merely inferred from Billy's indifferent answers that the affair had not been as hilariously successful as its author had anticipated. Nothing was said of the breakfast next morning, to which Billy had not been invited, and the reporter was asleep from force of habit when Ordway set forth to it.

Jane would not think of breakfasting with Guarda, and Barbara demurred to going without her.

"Ten o'clock breakfast!" cried Jane, "I guess not! I may go back to East Wilton a perverted being, but not so bad as that. I've had my breakfast, and at a Christian hour, and I don't want another—not to-day."

"But," suggested Ordway, "it isn't the breakfast, Jane. We're not going there just to get something to eat."

Would you know why she did not jump at this opportunity to spare himself what he had been pleased to regard as an ordeal? How small we are, to be sure! It offended him that anybody should be so unappreciative as not to be eager to meet Guarda.

"Why should we go, then?" Jane demanded.

"To see her."

"And be seen. Whatever she may think in her own heart, she isn't going to let on that she's on exhibition. She'll look at us."

"Guarda is my friend, Jane."

"Well, she's not mine. Allow that she invited you and Barbara because she wanted to see you. She's not seen me, and she'd be sorry if she had. I sha'n't go. I've got all I can do this blessed morning seeing that the trunks get to the depot and on the right train."

"Bother! The hotel porter will look out for that."

"And Jane will look after the porter. Run along to your Guarda, you two. There's no reason why you shouldn't."

Ordway gave it up and turned to Barbara. The girl had been holding silent debate while she listened.

"I don't think it would be polite not to go," she said.
"Let's not be late."

As an ordeal the breakfast was a shameful failure. It was a most agreeable hour, and Ordway held himself up to his own ridicule with merciless scorn. Guarda, past mistress of deportment in that she threw formality to the winds, devoted herself assiduously to Barbara, drawing from the girl those compliments that are so sweet because they are so ingenuously sincere, and deftly informing herself about the regrettable narrowness of home life and about its serene delights also. And Barbara bore herself with unaffected simplicity, without one trace of that rusticity that Ordway guiltily confessed to himself he had vaguely feared. She was to her manner born, which was good and natural, just as Guarda was, say, adapted to her manner, which was artificial.

Neither of them saw the artificiality. Both were too

blinded—one in one way and the other in another—to see beneath the surface. To them, that morning, she was all sympathy and graciousness; a delightful hostess. Her husband was not present, and she made no mention of him, which was so much in the ordinary course that Ordway actually forgot that objectionable gentleman's existence. Barbara never had heard of him.

"Before you go," said Guarda, as train time drew near, "just one little matter of business. About your aria, Mr. Ordway; would you be willing to have it done with a smaller orchestra than the score calls for?"

"Certainly," he answered, "if I make the arrangement."

"Will you do so? I know it is asking a great deal. It will take days of time to write a new score, will it not?"

"No; and even if so, I should like to do it. A composer must learn, you know, to achieve his results with small resources."

"You are quite right. With a smaller score I can use the piece much more frequently. I have now several engagements where I would like to sing it, but shall not be able to do so if full orchestra is required."

"I will attend to that. Let me take the score and parts along now, not only to refer to, but because I think some of the parts can be doctored so that they will do for either large or small band."

Guarda brought him the music, and with polite farewells they parted, Ordway accompanying Barbara to

the station. On the way he told her the true story of his aria, as he understood it, and reminded her that she had been the first to hear the music. She listened in silence.

"I was foolishly impatient about it at that time," he concluded. "Since then I have come to see that a composer by himself cannot possibly set forth whatever merit his work may have. In this very instance I did not realize the effectiveness of the piece until I heard Guarda sing it at Boxford."

"It is beautiful music," she responded, in a low tone. "I was very stupid not to grasp it when you played it. I have often thought about it since the Festival."

"But you didn't recognize it there?"

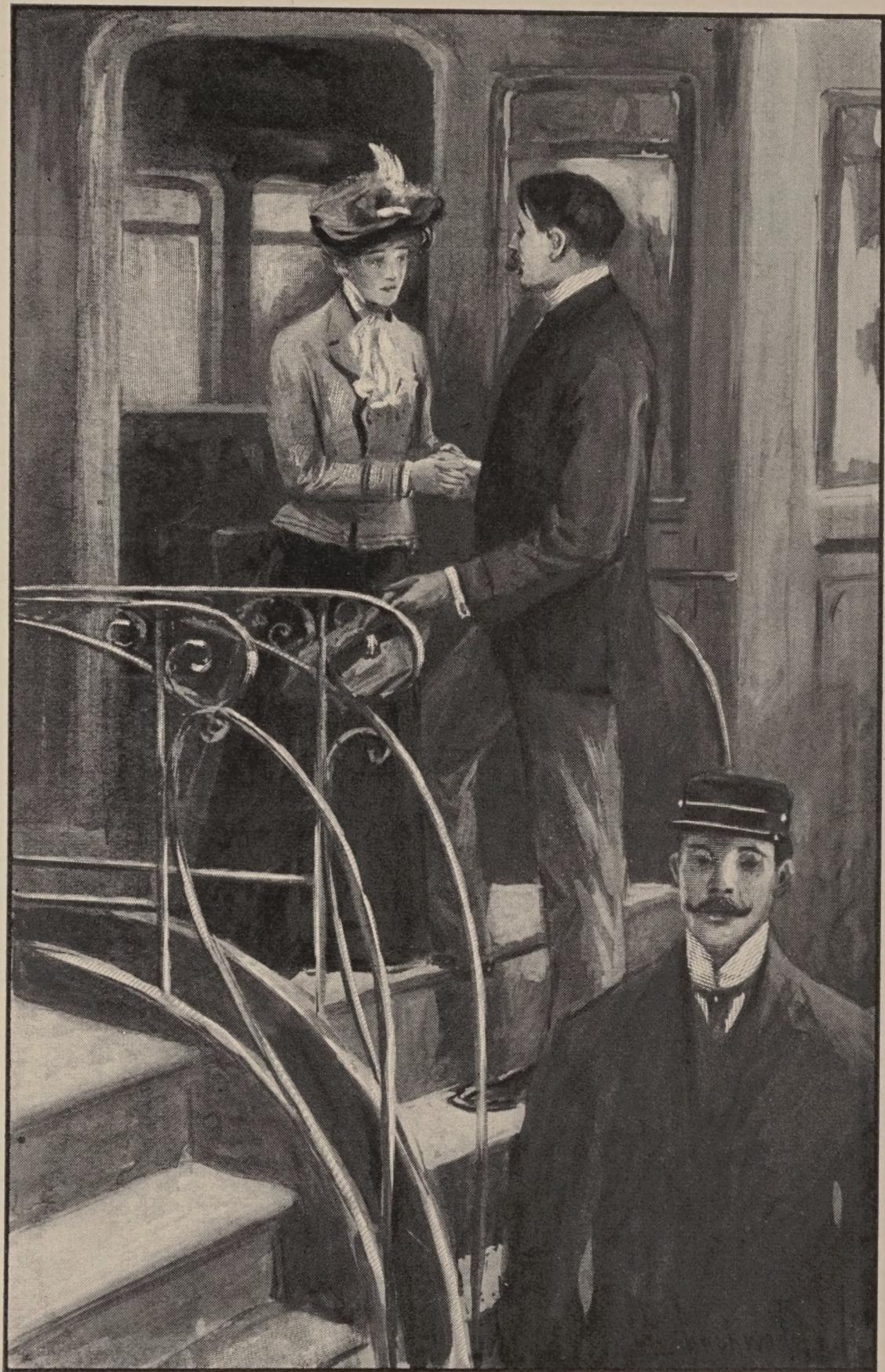
There was some hesitation before she replied: "No; but I think the singer must have dazzled me, for I remembered more about it as music than about anything else she sang there. I am very glad for your sake that she sings it."

Jane was at the station ahead of them, tickets bought, trunks checked, and eager for departure.

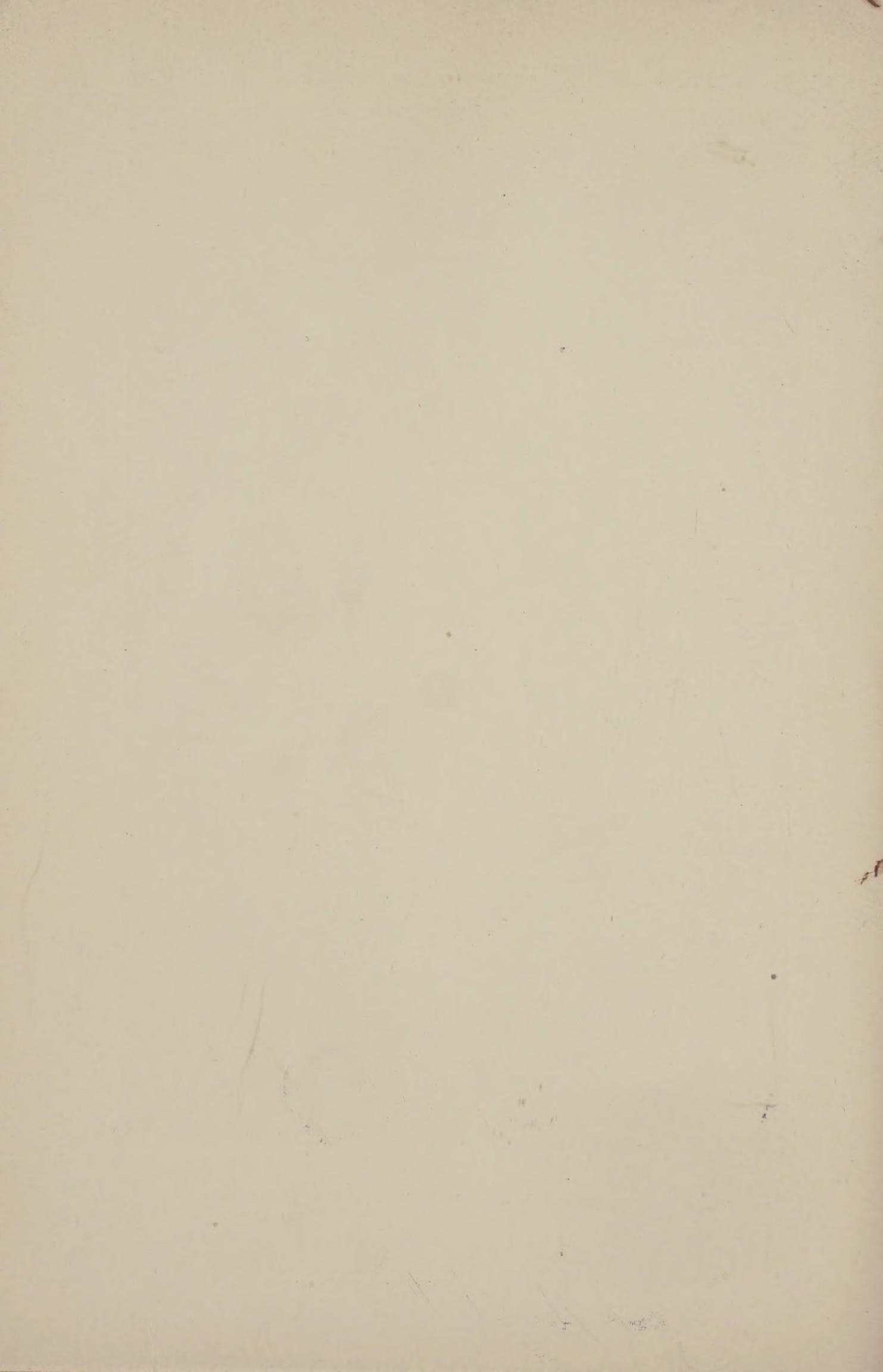
"It'll be a long good-bye," she said, waving her hand around comprehensively.

"Why!" said Ordway, "one would think you hadn't had a good time. Don't you like New York?"

"Like it!" she echoed, vehemently; "I'm dead in love with it; but it seems as if I couldn't get home too soon to break into the meeting-house and kneel down in my



"I do so hope she will make you happy. . . . Good-bye!"
See page 257.



pew and pray the Lord to forgive me for ever coming here. Train's ready. Let's get aboard."

Ordway accompanied them to the train, found seats for them, and stood in the aisle chatting till they heard the conductor's warning call. Then he raised his hat, shook hands hastily and started to go. Both had told him again and again how good he had been, how they appreciated the time he and Billy had devoted to them, and there was really nothing left to be said; but Barbara arose and followed him to the car platform.

"Herbert!" she said.

He looked around, surprised to know that she was there, and disturbed to see the pathetic fullness of her eyes.

"Herbert," she repeated, taking his hand in both hers, in the old, old way, "we are friends still, aren't we? It is that that has made me want to say something—just this," and her tone fluttered, "I do so hope she will make you happy. Good-bye. Quick! The train is going!"

It had started, and there was nothing for it but to jump off and watch it roll from the station.

PRESTO CON BRIO.

I.

In part she is to blame that has been tried;
He comes too near who comes to be denied.

—Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

In all human relationships there comes a period that should be marked by a note in one's diary, or a date scrawled on the wall, or a deed that fixes the time because it will not out from the memory; for thereafter the relationships cannot be changed. We call this period the crisis, and often, when it is signalized by no untoward or strenuous event, we are not aware that it has passed.

My new neighbor is an odd person. He rises at the most absurdly early hour and goes to pottering about his grounds, snipping the grass that grows a half-inch too high about a flower bed, plucking off the decaying leaves from a geranium that was transplanted last week from the conservatory, desisting from such occupation to stand, hands folded behind him, head thrown back, eyes intently searching the foliage of the oak whence come the liquid notes of the brown thrasher. I have

wondered a good deal about him since he came. We bow distantly, but neither makes overture to close acquaintance. I don't think I should like him, with his bucolic tastes and evidently eccentric view of things generally. He gives me a half uncomfortable feeling, for his very placidity disturbs me. One morning I, myself, have occasion to rise early, and I see him paddling about his lawn, ankle deep in sparkling dew, and I wonder contemptuously whether he will put on dry socks and shoes before breakfast. Presently he pauses, stoops, and picks up something that he examines curiously. I know what it is—my son's baseball. There was tribulation on this side the hedge last sundown. The ball was thrown when, according to parental edict, it should have been put in the capacious pocket; it was too dark to see where it went, and the grief of the small boy, and the cause thereof, were made known to all the neighborhood in a series of distressed howls that sentenced the youngster to early bed. My neighbor smiles reminiscently and crosses the lawn to the hedge that divides our reservations. There he carefully tosses the ball toward my house and watches till he sees it roll to a spot where my son cannot fail to find it when he goes for his bicycle at school time. That done, his hands clasp behind his back, and he splashes gently through the dew, cocking his ear for the duet of thrasher and robin. All unwittingly to both of us, the relations of myself and my new neighbor have passed a crisis. I care no more than previously to get acquainted with

him, but I am perfectly content that he who has no children shall go on nursing his flowers and listening to the prattle of the birds.

To those who observe without thinking, it often seems that Fate, or Providence, or the unassuming historian, contrive to bring human relationships to a crisis at the most inopportune and unexpected times. This is not the case. Given the human elements and the environment, and the matter works itself out in its own way, and if the making or breaking of destiny seems inopportune, that is because this human chemistry is as relentless as the grosser chemistry is certain. There must come a time when elements fuse or separate. Accident may hasten or delay the moment, but when it comes one and all are affected. So look to your watches, Billy Jameson and Herbert Ordway, for the crisis in your lives approaches. Look to your watch, Guarda; the hour will strike for you when it strikes for them. And yours, Signor Giuseppe Napoli, look to yours as you dodder about the lobby with your inexhaustible cigarettes—the time is near for you, also.

We who observe will look to our calendars at this period and note that it was on a Saturday that Barbara and Jane returned to East Wilton. Ordway plunged at once into work at his music paper, feverishly eager, as he thought, to make up for lost time. In reality the forces within him, which no man can control fully, were working for a momentous change, and he did not know it or suspect it. Billy, who had led a most exemplary

life for a solid week, reappeared abruptly in his favorite barrooms. Better for him, perhaps, if he had drunk steadily during the visit of the women from the home town, and maybe not; I cannot tell. I know only that the crash had to come, and what matter a few days sooner or later? His Saturday work was done brilliantly—as an engineer might say, under full steam. He was on duty Sunday, also, and the distemper waxed upon him. By Monday it had become excess, and the next day the city editor noticed it. A rapid course; but there had been days of substantial abstinence, an occasional glass of beer, a little cheap wine at dinner, merely staving off appetite and whetting the craving against the time when restraints were loosed.

Meantime, Billy's thoughts were on fire to an unusual degree. A certain situation that had been irksome was becoming intolerable. Stimulated fancy made it wholly so, and the worst of it was that in what Billy fondly believed were his sober moments he saw the situation in its most unendurable aspect. The torment was upon him when he awoke at noon.

"Last night," he told himself, "I thought I should bring the matter to a head, for I was full and yet I suffered; but, being full, I distrusted my judgment. Extraordinary how full a man can get when his mind is harassed and not get drunk! Sober, I suffer still, and, my judgment unobscured, I cannot see that this thing ought to continue. It can't!"

He got up and dressed slowly, very slowly. It was

even then time to report for duty; but a half-hour, or twice that, wouldn't matter. What did he care? Let the city editor grumble.

"I believe I'm a human being," his thoughts ran. "As such I have a right to happiness. That's in the Declaration, and who am I that I should venture to dispute with Jefferson? The finical point is that another man stands in the way—but does he? No; it's Guarda. It's up to her to say no. If she should say it, and I suppose it's likely, I should at least know my ground. As it is, I am teetering on my own impulses without getting anywhere, when a jump would settle it all at once."

Teetering, the old-fashioned word—he hadn't thought of it since some remote time in his childhood—brought back a rueful experience to memory. He was learning to swim, but not yet did he dare dive head first into the deep water just above the dam. Down beside the mill was a pile of lumber from which one board that had been carelessly stacked protruded two or three feet above an expanse of sawdust. It had nothing like the dizzy elasticity of the diving board at the pond, but it offered a tempting opportunity for practice. He climbed up to it and teetered hesitatingly for a moment while he thought it all out. The sawdust would not open and close over him, as the water would, and if it did, it wouldn't be so cold. He could just scramble out again laughing and dust himself. Of course it was soft—there could be nothing softer than sawdust, unless it was a haystack. Hadn't he shoveled it, and run

his hands in it many a time? It was so soft, then, that it would be a jolly nice cushion for his head, and after a few tries he could run up to the pond and surprise the fellows with a grand dive from the long board.

So Billy, the small boy, teetered—one, two, three! The mill hand who had the luck to see said that it was as fine a headfirst dive as any grown man in East Wilton could make. He soused Billy's head in the stream below the mill, and when the lad was brought to he was sent in a wagon to Dr. Hubbard, who soused his head in arnica and sent him home to bed. A few days later Billy made a secret visit to the spot and spent some time on his hands and knees, feeling of the sawdust. He came to the sage conclusion that sawdust that has been exposed for months to the elements packs harder by about three times than paving stone.

Billy, the grown man, smiled faintly at the reminiscence. "I haven't anything to practise on in this instance," he reflected; "and I'm old enough to take a plunge without it."

The smile faded quickly, and he went to the corner nearest the flat for his bracer. It soothed him physically, but there was no nervous buoyancy in it. He took another. "Of course, there's Ordway," he was thinking; "he's in it as deep as I am, but he's different. If Guarda were free, I'd jump off the bridge rather than stand in his way. That means, of course, that I'd do nothing of the sort; but I would crack him up to Guarda. I'd do the self-abnegation act to the most

heroic degree and be best man at his wedding without a quiver. As it is, he'll never speak. And he can stand it. He's got his music. He can let himself go in poetry. There are outlets for him; for me, none but confession. I've nothing but this damned newspaper drudgery to distract me, and there's nothing in it. Confession! I wonder I hadn't thought of it in that way before. I can tell Guarda just how I feel, and that it's got to end one way or the other. That's what Ordway would do if it wasn't that he's got the strength of character to shut up. Confession! Why not?"

He took another bracer, and continued on toward the office, where he arrived two hours late. By then his mind was made up, and he entered the building with brisk steps. In the elevator it occurred to him that he might be questioned as to his tardiness. If it was a dull day for news he might slip in unnoticed. If there had been something doing, it behooved him to think fast; for now, more than ever—now that he was to take a step that should be decisive—it was important to retain his position.

The reporters' room was deserted by all save the city editor and his assistant. Something had been doing. Billy went to his desk and began to write furiously. The city editor looked at him through his spectacles and over them. He took up a memorandum or two from his desk and laid them down again. Then he looked thoughtfully out of the window. Presently,

"Mr. Jameson," said the city editor, "what are you writing?"

"Caught a story on the way down," replied Billy, without looking up; "be through in a minute."

The minute expanded to nearly ten, but eventually the reporter marched up to his superior's desk and laid down his copy. "It's not exactly news," he said, smiling, "but too good to let go, I thought."

The city editor glanced at the manuscript and saw that it was a description of a typical street scene done in Billy's most humorous, fetching style. Such contributions were always welcome from him. On many an occasion matter-of-fact news had been sacrificed to make room for his squibs, for everybody read them. The city editor fumbled among some papers on a pigeon hook. Referring to our calendars, we will remember that this was Wednesday. A sheet of paper was detached from the hook and laid upon the desk. Billy recognized it as a part of his last night's story. Its matter, or the substance of it, was in the paper--he had looked for it while dressing—and this sheet was smudged with printers' finger-marks.

"Is that your writing?" asked the city editor, as he filled his pipe absently.

"Certainly," said Billy.

The words were badly scrawled, the lines uneven, and the individual letters all out of character. Billy observed, but held his peace, smiling nonchalantly.

"The handwriting," remarked the city editor, striking

a match, "is not like that you have just brought in. My attention was called to this by the night desk as a danger signal."

Billy laughed. "I'm sorry for the night desk," said he. "That copy was written on the elevated train to save the paper's time. I shouldn't be surprised if the train had been drinking. I noticed that it staggered at the curves. We might get up a stunning Sunday story about it—our dissipated rapid transit; reckless disregard of propriety on the part of some of the oldest cars on the line; terror at the night desk—don't you know, eh?"

The city editor crumpled up the suspected page of copy and dropped it in a waste basket. "Sit down," said he, and that he didn't smile broadly was probably due to the fact that it was part of his duty to hold his pipe between his teeth and talk at the same time. He took up the memoranda that had been briefly considered when first he saw Billy in the office, and proceeded to explain what little the paper knew about an important financial deal that was supposed to be in the wind. At the end he gave the memoranda to Billy and told him to find out about it. Billy left the office immediately in the most businesslike manner.

"I wonder," said the city editor, absently, "if he's really sober?"

"You never can tell about him," responded the assistant.

By six o'clock Billy had turned in as clean-cut a story

as the most exacting editor could desire. It was not complete as a matter of news, for there lacked confirmation of certain features; but the magnates who could confirm or deny had not been seen. The city editor unhesitatingly made it Billy's business for the evening to look up the magnates at their homes, their clubs, the hotel lobbies—anywhere where they might be found. Billy said "All right"—his usual way of announcing that he understood his instructions—and, without stopping for dinner, went directly to Guarda's hotel.

The clerk told him that she was at dinner, and Billy, strolling to the dining-room door, saw her. He did not go in, but waited a full hour in the lobby. It was early in his waiting that Calloway came in. The two men nodded an indifferent greeting, and Calloway went into the dining-room. Billy's teeth were on edge as he sauntered up to the dining-room door a few minutes later. Yes, Calloway was at table with Guarda. The reporter wheeled about abruptly and went to the sidewalk, but it was only for a moment. The cool air of evening was no better than the hot atmosphere of the lobby.

At last Guarda came from the dining-room. Napoli and Calloway were with her. They were chatting gayly—that is, Guarda and Calloway were; the signor was as silent and emotionless as usual. Billy went directly toward the group, and before he was in speaking distance Calloway bowed and withdrew. Guarda saw the reporter, and in her impulsive way—or was it acting?—

she stepped forward to meet him. They shook hands.

"I want to see you," he said, abruptly.

"That is a promise of good news," she answered, looking at him, as it seemed, with eagerness. "Will it keep for a short time?"

"It will if it must," said he.

"I am afraid it must, Billy. I have an engagement for which I shall be late as it is. Can you call later?"

"When?"

"How short you are! I shall be anxious to hear about it, whatever it is. Will you call at ten?"

"Yes."

He lifted his hat gravely and departed. Guarda looked after him curiously, and then went on to the carriage that was waiting for her.

Billy looked over his memoranda. There was an onyx-topped bar in front of him, and a red cherry was in the bottom of the glass.

"Twice," said he, as he set the glass down.

He thought of dinner, but he had no appetite. The two drinks sufficed, for a time, and he went hunting for news. One magnate, found at his home, refused to talk. Another, encountered in a hotel where financial magnates are in the habit of whiling away an evening with shop talk, told him there was nothing in it. Two or three others were out of town—that is, such was the information given by the servants at their doors. There was one more—Stimson, his name was. He lived on West End avenue, and he had the reputation among

the newspaper boys as one who never "gave up." A call on him could be nothing more than a perfunctory attention to duty; it could result in nothing better than one line in the story, and a short one at that—"Mr. Stimson declined to talk."

Billy looked at the clock, that faithful employee of the place whose most important duty it was to warn the bartenders when to close the front door and pull down the curtains. Half-past nine. It was possible to make a dash up to Stimson's, get his refusal to be interviewed, and be at Guarda's hotel no more than a few unessential minutes late. That would be doing his whole duty by the paper; and as he stood there debating, Billy felt a momentary glow of that warm enthusiasm that stimulates the newspaper reporter to long hours of overwork, that compensates him for comfortless existence, that exercises his ingenuity, causes him to face actual peril when need be, and makes him a hero among the world's toilers. Yes, it would be a profound satisfaction to see Stimson and feel that he had left no stone unturned that might reveal matter to make his story complete. Stimson undoubtedly would decline to talk—he might even refuse to see the reporter—but that was no concern of Billy's. Duty—the newspaper man seldom makes use of the word, but that is what it is—demanded that a call be made upon Stimson, and what that man might say, or might not say, was a secondary consideration.

Pride in his vocation was stirred to the degree that

Billy perceived a certain nobility in the line of conduct that demanded the subordination of his great private interests to the perfunctory task in behalf of the paper. Thus far what he had to add to the story already turned in could be covered in six lines. He would go to Stimson's house and get the half line to make it complete.

He started for the nearest elevated station. Presently he saw a bareheaded, aproned man inclining inquiringly toward him from the other side of a high counter. Billy told him what he would have, and when it had been put away he went to Guarda's hotel and paced up and down the office till he knew that she had returned. Then he sent up his card, and in due course he was in her presence.

She was alone, her eyes were aglow with anticipation, and her manner, if possible, was more gracious than ever.

"It is too bad to have kept you waiting," said she. "I have been wondering all the evening about you, and hoping—— But it's your turn, Billy. What is it?"

He told her. Standing like a statue, his enunciation unmistakably distinct, and his utterance suggestive of the deepest deliberation, he told her.

"Billy!" she gasped, but there could be no lack of comprehension. Never was language more direct, never were words more carefully chosen to convey the exact thought. It was not misunderstanding, it was shock that tied her tongue for the moment.

"I've got to know," said he. "A man who is on fire

must either go to destruction, or the passion must be subdued by her who causes it."

A dozen different emotions seemed to fight within her. One came momentarily to the fore, and she spoke coldly.

"Mr. Jameson," said she, "have you forgotten my husband?"

"No," he answered; "but you don't love him. What are conventions——"

"Mr. Jameson! Billy!" she cried, in terrible agitation. "I did not think that you would insult me. Can you not realize that you are offering me an insult?"

"The one judge of an insult," said he, with appalling steadiness, "is the woman to whom it is offered. From her verdict there is no appeal."

She stared at him, amazed. "Then," said she, suddenly, "I so decide it. Never approach me with apology, for I will not listen."

Her hand was pointed commandingly toward the door. A shiver passed over him. Then, with that bitterness that is the woeful result of a most generous nature turned to gall, he said: "You would not say so if Ordway stood in my place."

Guarda strode to the door and opened it.

"Never come back," said she—"never!"

He went forth as one who knows the way but sees it not.

II.

Now conscience wakes despair
That slumbered—wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be
Worse. —Milton.

No one knows, Billy least of all, where he went after leaving Guarda. When he looked at his watch in the elevator at the office it was half-past twelve, midnight. Substantially two hours had passed, and they were all blank save that he knew he had just stepped from an East Side elevated train at the City Hall station. Guarda's hotel was on the west side of town. There was time enough to write the six-line addition to his afternoon story, he knew that—knew that there had been an afternoon story, but the subject of it and all the details had been lost somewhere in that appalling blank. What had been his errand when he left the office some six hours ago? To see Guarda and tell her—but that was not what the city editor had sent him to do. He remembered his errand to Guarda with horrible distinctness. What else had he done? There had been an interval of waiting that he had put in by going somewhere and seeing somebody about something.

"What was it about? Whom had he seen? Where had he been?

"Editorial floor, Mr. Jameson," said the elevator man.

"I'll go down again," Billy responded, steadily. "I've forgotten something.

He had been the only passenger on the way up, and somebody joined him on the way down. Racking his disordered brain for some clue to his business, a way out of his dilemma occurred to him that brought a ghastly smile to his face. He knew that one significant word would evoke a train of recollections. What a joke it would be, then, to walk up to the night desk and ask for the assignment sheet! There he would find his name set against the work he had been detailed to do, and he would remember. Or, more brazen still, he might startle the night editor, who had been so suspicious of his handwriting, by plumping a frank question at him: "What am I supposed to report on?" Either way would accomplish the immediate result—and his discharge on the following morning. Therefore neither was to be considered seriously, for Billy, such of him as was awake, was again the devoted newspaper man. His remnant of pride was to the fore, the same impulse that had decided him to call on Stimson. At this moment he could not remember Stimson, or that no call had been made upon him.

His first clue to the forgotten business came to him when he stepped from the elevator on the ground floor. There had been some memoranda connected with the

matter. The city editor had given him at least a newspaper cutting and a slip of paper with some names written on it. Billy went through his pockets and ran over the numerous papers he found there. All appeared to be either foreign to business or absurdly out of date. The memoranda he wanted, then, must have been left for the edification of some uptown bartender. Again he looked over his papers.

"Hello, Billy!"

It was a fellow-reporter hurrying in with a belated story. The newcomer ran into the elevator car and told the man to "let 'er go." Billy crammed the papers into one pocket and went out to the street. He shivered at a thought that teemed with gross improbabilities, but he seemed to hear the night editor ask, "Where's Jameson?" and the incoming reporter answer, "Downstairs, trying to remember where he's at." It seemed as if all his loyal friends in the office were gathering around the night editor to tell tales about him. Impossible! But Billy fled from the vicinity. He went into City Hall Park and halted eventually in a dark angle by the steps to the Court House. There he pressed both palms against the cold walls of the building and reviewed the day with such mighty effort at concentration that the perspiration rolled down his cheeks. The morning awakening was clear; his thoughts then had been about Guarda. He recalled faking a street scene to account for his tardiness. There had been a conversation about

his crooked handwriting. Then an assignment that took him—

The reporter trembled from head to foot under the fearful strain to which he subjected his exhausted nerves. All blank except that that had to do with *Guarda* and the last few minutes. Somewhere in that black hiatus was a word, an incident, a hiding reminiscence, that could be made to issue forth, light the abyss and redeem his pride. Was that the word? He bent his head and dug his nails into his palms, for he seemed to hear a voice in the yawning blackness that said, "There's nothing in it." Was that but a horrible mockery of his strenuous effort to do his duty by the paper, or was it somehow connected with his business? It was a pitiable clue, if clue it was; but he fixed his mind upon it and gripped it hard. "Nothing in it. Nothing in it. Nothing in it." He repeated the words, again and again, framing them with his lips, and at last he saw other lips frame them—lips set in a face he knew, and that presently he could name—Mr. X., one of the most prominent operators in Wall Street. A dozen times had Billy interviewed him. Nothing in— Ah! ah! now it was coming back—the rumored deal of sensational magnitude—the financiers he had seen about it in the hotel lobbies—the afternoon story! Now! now he had it, all as clear as daylight; and he set out for the office, gritting his teeth and clenching his fists lest again it escape him.

It was ten minutes to one when Billy went briskly

to his desk and began to write. Not a man in the office looked up. They were too busy to note the presence and movements of a reporter who was going about his work in the conventional way. The six-line story was written in half as many minutes. Then Billy hesitated. It was not complete, for no mention was made of Stimson. He remembered with sufficient clearness now that he had not seen that taciturn banker. Bah! at that hour there was no time for judgment to listen to argument, no time to dally with conscience. Billy dabbèd once more at his copy paper, and wrote the short line that rounded out his work and made the report complete.

"Mr. Stimson declined to talk."

He sauntered up to the night desk and laid down his copy.

"Had a long chase after these fellows," said he, "but I kept at it as long as there was any chance of getting anything."

"Couldn't establish it, eh?" queried the night editor, glancing at the brief paragraph marked "Add Wall Street Deal."

"No. Seems to be nothing in it," and at the words, uttered without premeditation, Billy all but shuddered. "That is," he added, "they're not ready to admit it."

"Glad of it," said the night editor, shortly. "We're crowded to death to-night."

The day's work was done, for Billy, and the strenuous last half-hour was followed by dizzy reaction. His

knees were painfully weak when he stood in the elevator, and he was overcome with faintness. It did not occur to him that he had eaten neither breakfast nor dinner, and he had no thought of supper. The excitement of the crisis in his work through which he had passed was quelled quickly, for that lay in the ordinary course of events. It was not the first time, although the worst, that he had forgotten his assignment between leaving some place uptown and arriving at the office. His memory never had failed to come to his rescue in time. But he could not drown Guarda; and when, at three o'clock, or thereabout, he sank upon his bed, her imperious dismissal of him was as distinct in his consciousness as if he were enduring a horrid dream.

So, then, we have come to Thursday morning. Ordway was astir at his usual hour, but there was nothing to call him forth until nearly noon, and he busied himself after breakfast with the reduced orchestration of his aria that he had promised to make for Guarda. About ten o'clock came a knock at his door, and when he had said "Come in," there stood Elise with a letter. She beamed a most distracting smile upon the musician, and then placed her hand affectedly upon her heart.

"Ah! m'sieu," she said; "such stairs! And so many of them!"

He had risen, and was offering her a chair.

"Sit down," he responded, cordially, "and get your breath. If you had to climb them often you wouldn't

mind. I can come up on the run and not notice that my heart beats any the faster."

"Dieu!" said she, calmly. "There is a reason for that."

"So?" he inquired; "a reason beside the fact that I am used to the stairs?"

"Indeed, yes, I think so, m'sieu."

Elise was seated and pretending to fan herself with the letter. It was in a small, square envelope, and made about as much breeze as might a single roseleaf.

"Well," he said, in as nearly a light way as he ever spoke, "I know you are dying to tell me, so speak out. Why should not my heart beat faster after running upstairs?"

"Is it not that m'sieu has no heart?" She looked up at him archly.

"No heart?" he echoed, blankly. "That is rather funny. I thought I had enough for two."

Elise shook her head. "See!" she said, and she called his attention to the letter, but without offering it to him, "I come for the first time to your room. I bring something in my hand that you cannot help to see, and you cannot be so—what you call it—so stupid as to know not what it is—a letter, m'sieu, from Guarda! And yet m'sieu stands there so cold like an ice hill. He does not tear it from my hand; he does not cover it with kisses—dame! he does not ask for it! That is because there is no heart in m'sieu; is it not?"

"I can hardly regard the evidence as convincing,"

he answered, quietly. "So it is only a letter from madame——"

"Only!"

"Should I not suppose that you had come to arrange for music lessons, and that I should be disappointed at not being able to add a pupil to my list?"

Elise stared at him for a moment. "Dieu!" she said; "when you try you make the joke like that other, that Billy; is it not?"

"Did you say you had a letter for me?"

She threw it upon his table and shrugged her shoulders. "If m'sieu will pardon me," she snapped, "I am to wait for his answer."

Ordway nodded and opened the envelope. It contained a very short note addressed to "My dear friend," asking him to call at five in the afternoon, and to say through Elise whether or no he could do so.

"Very well," he said; "you may say yes."

"Is it that m'sieu will not write?" asked Elise, elevating her brows.

He glanced again at the letter. "There is nothing more to say than that," he answered. "You can remember as much as one word, can't you?"

Elise did not reply. "But," he added, "don't let me hurry you. Do wait till your heart beats normally and you have breath enough for the stairs."

She seemed to take him at his word, for she sat still and he took up his pen.

"M'sieu!" she exclaimed, suddenly, "I should like to stick a pin into you!"

"Good gracious! Why?"

"To see what would happen."

"I can tell you."

"Well, m'sieu?"

"I should holler. Have you learned that English word?"

"I know what it means. It is what you say to the telephone, is it not? But I do not think m'sieu would holler."

"Perhaps not if he knew that the stab was coming. You might try," and he took a fresh pen from his box, crossed to her and held the back of his hand temptingly within her reach.

Elise did not take the proffered pen. She looked up at his face and knit her brows as she saw his bantering expression. Then she stroked his hand tentatively. "Yes," she murmured; "flesh and blood, just like the hand of a man; and, oh! what it is to think that there is one so beautiful who would caress that hand tenderly if she dared!"

Ordway dropped his hand to his side as if it had been stung.

"Elise!" said he, sternly, "you forget yourself!"

"No," she responded, unconcernedly, "I no forget. M'sieu appears to be a man, but he is blind. That is all."

He was speechless for a moment, dazed by a confu-

sion of emotions and thoughts. He saw now, or what he had been childishly innocent at the start, the purport of all Elise's insinuations. Disturbed, indignant, astonished—aye, fearful—he knew not how to meet the situation. Calloway's face had been slapped for a less direct insult. Elise was a woman, and there she sat, flashing her dark eyes upon him and smiling mockingly.

"But there is hope for m'sieu," she added, with a laugh. "He has ears to hear, and he blushes divinely. Dame! but it is to laugh!"

"Madame Napoli is waiting for your return," he said, coldly, and he opened the door.

She arose at once, but it was still with mockery and insinuation. "*Madame Napoli!*" she repeated, with a world of scorn on the title. "It is such a barrier, is it not, that a strong man cannot leap over it? Adieu, m'sieu. Elise is to say yes. Ah, well, she had no need to prick him with a pin to draw his blood. Adieu, m'sieu."

Mocking and suggestive to the last, she departed, and Ordway stood by the door trembling. He tried presently to resume his work, but the pen would not do his plain bidding. There was no problem on the music paper to make him pause, but he would have found it equally difficult to write the alphabet. He drew a bar line, saw that it wavered, and gave it up. Going forth, he walked until it was time to meet a pupil at his church.

It may have been hunger—certainly it was not habit—that awaked Billy an hour before noon. He lay for a

moment in conscious, awful exhaustion. Without effort he reviewed the crisis of his relations with Guarda. That scene was burned into his memory to stay till death, and he knew it. He tried, not in the hope of dismissing it, but to alleviate the anguish it caused, to think of business. What had been his work for the paper yesterday? Ah! the financial story! He remembered the circumstances, the fact that some hours of his life had dropped away from him to be recalled in the nick of time by a furious struggle, and he crawled part way from bed, only to sink back again. He was dreadfully weak, but it was not altogether weakness that sent him upon his face. Billy was overwhelmed with hot shame.

There came upon him, as there had before, a humiliation at the deterioration of his physique, and there was added to it now the bitter consciousness that in his excess, in a period when reason was dethroned, he had taken a step that could not be justified. He had insulted the woman he loved.

“Worthless!” he called himself. “A sot! A contemptible wreck!” and other things which his still delirious fancy readily brought to mind.

And this brought a reaction that was wholesome to a degree. Often had he jeered at men who had been ruined because a woman said them no. If there were anything more to be despised than a drunkard, it had seemed to him to be a man who gave way to sickly repining in the face of a woman’s rejection. Here he

was apparently at the bottom of both abysses, and he swore that he would not stand it. There was something of manly pride left, and on that he would build anew. Reform! Detestable word, but he must face it. He would reform, inwardly as well as outwardly, and his friends would not recognize him.

It was with thoughts of this kind that he again essayed to rise, and this time he succeeded, though he had to catch at the bureau, his head whirled so. There was the morning paper in the next room. Ordway always left it for him. He must see that and find where he stood. His memory might have played him a wretched trick.

Billy staggered into the sitting-room, found the paper, and turned its pages with trembling hands. The first thing he saw was his humorous street scene, but he read merely enough of it to be sure that it was his own. He remembered nothing of it, but it had the earmarks of his style, and he browsed further. Ah, yes! the rumored deal! Here it was under an ordinary head, dismissed as one of the premature reports of something that might come true after months had passed. This was his story, word for word as he had written it. He remembered the phraseology now. It was all there to the last line: "Mr. Stimson declined to talk."

The reporter felt better. It was possible now to think of getting into his clothes, and he wondered, without seeing anything humorous in it, how he had managed to get out of them when he came home. Dressing is

a difficult task this morning; but never mind, Billy—there comes a time when a man's clothes are put on for him. The limbs shake—aye, but what is a chair for, and what the convenient bed but to rest upon? Courage, Billy! There comes a time when there has to be no morning struggle with clothes, or faintness, or appetite. The head swims at the effort of putting on the coat? The quivering body shrinks from walking? There is a terror about trying to descend the stairs? Patience, Billy! The time comes when strong arms bear the tired, worn-out body forth and a carriage waits at the door. There! steady, now; there is no hurry. What matter a few minutes more or less in reporting at the office? It is not yet noon, not quite. And this is Thursday. You haven't thought of that, Billy; but that is the day. Would it mean nothing to you if you had thought of it? Well, well; this day with its momentous significance has yet half its length to run.

The bartender in the saloon at the corner may have chanced to see Billy passing without pause for his customary bracer, but that stolid observer could not have dreamed that Billy had sworn a mighty resolution—that the fun-loving newspaper man had called there for the last time. No more bracers—that is, of the bartender's kind. Billy crawled on—it was too slow and painful a march to be called a walk—to a drugstore.

"I have been drunk," he said, bluntly, to the clerk. "I don't remember that I ate anything yesterday, but

I drank barrels. I want something to straighten me out."

"Have you eaten anything to-day?" asked the clerk, with all the deference due to so uncommon a customer.

"No; but I will as soon as I have a stomach for it. That's what I'm after, I suppose—a substitute stomach."

The clerk gave him a bitter mixture, which he swallowed.

"Shall I try a breakfast now?" asked Billy.

"No," was the advice; "wait till you feel like eating."

The reporter went on to the elevated road and bought three or four newspapers while waiting for his train. He did not look at them until he had found a seat and the train had started. Then he began a systematic examination of their contents, as was his custom, but he did not carry his quest far, for on the first page of the first paper he took up was a story under a scare head about one of the greatest financial deals known to modern times. It was the matter upon which he had been at work. This paper evidently believed that the deal was an accomplished fact; and well it might, for there was authoritative announcement of it in the shape of a column interview with Banker Stimson.

"Mr. Stimson declined to talk."

Billy's heart sank heavily. Had Stimson actually broken his rule and "given up"? Or was this a conscienceless fake by a daring guesser? Not the latter, for the quotation of the banker's words was direct. Indeed, the interview had all the appearance of having

been prepared by the banker himself against the time when the reporters should call for his word on the subject. There was a way to confirm that supposition, and Billy took it. He turned to the other papers. Every one had a heavily displayed interview with Stimson. He compared the reports. The interview was exactly the same in every paper. Stimson had dictated it to the reporters in a body, or had prepared it at his office and had his secretary make copies. It mattered not just how the statement had been given forth. The crushing fact was that every paper in town had it except Billy's.

He dropped the papers upon his knee and tried to choke down despair. All the humiliation of the hour of waking rushed back upon him with tenfold force. Reform! Impossible with his disgrace and unfaithfulness published abroad; for so it would be in every newspaper office in town, not by black type, but by blacker shop talk. He was disgraced, irretrievably disgraced, and that he had disgraced himself was aside from the mark. It was the plain fact that counted, and, worst of all, he knew now that he was indeed worthless —of no use to himself or anybody.

Then upon that abysmal conviction came hurrying, racing, tearing along, a terrible idea. It fastened its crunching talons upon his heart and mind, and neither wit nor reason could dislodge it. From thenceforth Billy's course was guided—nay, commanded—by that dark officer of destiny.

III.

That fellow seems to me to possess but one idea, and
that a wrong one. —Johnson.

Billy left his papers in the car and went to a restaurant. You must eat, the idea said; if something is to be accomplished, there must be strength for it, and we need all we can muster, you and I. The reporter resisted feebly at first. It is merely your stomach that rebels, said the idea; see how long you have made it do your bidding! What excess of obnoxious fluid you have compelled it to carry! Make it serve you now, and in a few hours it will thank you and give you rich return in needed strength. So Billy sat down and ordered that that he thought could be swallowed most easily. That's right, chuckled the idea, hoarsely; hoodwink your abused stomach into believing that another drink is coming. We shall get on, you and I. But how? Billy began to ask, anxiously; it would be worse than nothing to fail. Aye, responded the idea, frowning darkly; there must be no possibility of failure. Pistols miss fire, an excited man's aim may be bad, knives break at the handle, or strike a button and are deflected. Think, then, of what may be done with ordi-

nary human strength and the implements Nature gave you. Think! Eat, that you may think clearly; eat that you may have strength for your purpose—for me! It is a dreadful purpose, protested Billy, in a last despairing attempt at insubordination. What! cried the idea, so loudly that it seemed as if all the chattering lunchers must be startled by it. What! worse than a useless life? Worse than to be snuffed out without doing one stroke of real good? Pah! stick not at conventions. Look to the end and let that justify the means if you still think action needs justification. Accomplish something worth while, Billy—something worth while! something worth while!

Thus the unequal debate ended. Billy, vanquished, nursed the idea, coddled it and saw it grow. He came to glory in its growth, and he hugged it deeper into his heart. There were moments when a quaking caution possessed him, and he looked furtively at his neighbors to see whether they noticed anything unusual. Well he knew—for was he not sober?—that the black idea could not be seen. His gruesome companion did not sit in the chair beside him. It was hidden from common vision. But he, himself—he, Billy—felt so changed that it seemed as if somebody, the familiar waiter, at least, must observe the change. No; the stupid throng at the tables rattled its knives, worked its jaws and laughed its cheerful laughs as if there were no such thing in the world as a black idea. Billy actually addressed his companion on the subject. We're fooling

them, he said, and the idea grinned back his own gloomy satisfaction. The waiter was as blind as the rest. He saw nothing more than a frequent customer making a somewhat eccentric meal for midday, and if he thought of it he minded that this had happened before, and that on other occasions, unlike this one, the eccentric customer had departed leaving his order paid for but untouched.

It was the lightest of light breakfasts that Billy put down, but his stomach held it; and, thus fortified, he went on to the office. The city room was at its liveliest. Hardly a man had started out on his assignment. Some were studying memoranda given them by the city editor and planning their afternoon's work. Two were at the moment receiving their instructions. Others were writing specials, or making up their space bills, or chatting while waiting to be called to the desk for orders. The few who saw Billy come in nodded pleasantly, and he returned the greeting in his usual nonchalant manner. They don't see anything, either, he said silently to it within his bosom. He sat at his desk and methodically clipped his stories from the morning paper. These he pasted on a long sheet of manilla paper with other articles published on previous days. When he had discovered and pasted every scrap he had had published since last payday, he measured the various articles and calculated their value to him at the established column rate. The figures were set down upon his bill, and after he had added them he subtracted

from the total the amount that might be charged for the street scene and the financial story of yesterday. At that the total proved to be more than fifty dollars.

He looked hard at the figures and counted the money in his pockets. There was not much of the latter. It was too near the week end for a considerable surplus, but he was fairly satisfied. The amount could be made to do—if he had the spending of it. Ordway was habitually economical, but in this matter he might be inclined to extravagance. Idle speculation, however; the amount would be, in round numbers, sixty dollars better than nothing, and that was worth while.

The men were drifting out rapidly now. Billy pretended to be absorbed in his newspaper, but he read not, and from the tail of his eye he saw the last man depart. The city room was significantly quiet, for no voice called to him from the corner where the city editor sat.

Billy arose with a kind of jerk, as if he had taken a sudden resolution, and went over to that corner, carrying his bill and pasted slips in his hand. There was an easy smile on his face, set and kept there by the idea.

"Mr. Jameson," said the city editor, in a low, strained tone, "we have no work for you."

"I know it," responded Billy. "I could have sent in a written resignation, but I preferred to face the music and have it out with you."

The city editor nestled in his chair as if he wished the reporter had preferred resignation to discharge. "I

can't tell you how sorry I am," he said, and he fumbled so in filling his pipe that the tobacco lay in crumbs all over his desk. "You may have observed that I didn't speak of it while the other men were here."

"Yes, I noticed that. I have made out my bill to date, and I ask you to observe that I have withdrawn the charge for yesterday's pretence at work."

He laid the bill on the desk, and the city editor looked it over, not from any desire to audit it in the usual way, but because it served to relieve the embarrassment of the moment. Presently he put his O. K. and initials on the bill and pushed it away from him.

"Personally," he said, "I am very sorry, and I should be so officially if I thought we were losing the man who came to us four or five years ago. You have been one of the most brilliant newspaper men in the city, Mr. Jameson, and you could be still if you would stop drinking."

"I have stopped," said Billy, quietly; and then, as the reply seemed to embarrass the city editor still further, he added, hastily: "But I do not ask you to believe that or to take me back."

"I wouldn't," the city editor said, "for, after the disastrous beating you allowed us to get this morning, the chief wouldn't sustain me in retaining you. I'd like to ask, though, if you really saw Mr. Stimson, or if that last line in your report was a fake."

"It was a lie," answered Billy. "I never went near the man."

The city editor drew a long breath and puffed silently for a moment. "Of course, it makes no difference," he commented, at last; "but I did hope you had some sort of explanation. I have said nothing about this to anybody. It may be two or three days before your absence will be noticed by the other boys. Meantime you may drop into a good thing on some other paper. There are plenty of changes going on, and you must have friends outside this office. I suggest that you make a break for another place at once. Get hold of one before anything is known to your discredit, and you'll know how to keep it. You can refer to me with safety."

So the smile that had been summoned to make impudent face at a wrathful superior was unnecessary! Billy was wellnigh prostrated with astonishment. For a single instant his purpose wavered, but the idea went to barking and snarling within him. Delusion! it said; your curse will follow you. Let him be kind, if he will. It is nothing to you. Accomplish something worth while! And, dominated by the idea, Billy hurriedly interrupted.

"Thank you," he said. "I appreciate that; but I am quitting the newspaper business. I shall not write another line. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand. The city editor grasped it, looking blankly at him, and gripping his pipe with his teeth.

"Good-bye," he muttered, and Billy went striding

across the room. He paused in the counting-room to cash his bill and wheedled the paymaster, with characteristic bantering, to hunting through his money for a fifty-dollar bank note.

"Don't you see," said Billy, "it won't be so easy to spend that. If it were in tens and fives, zip! away they'd go for rent and board, and clothes, and such frivolities."

"And cold bottles," suggested the paymaster, taking a shot at Billy's weakness.

"Oh, no! Cold bottles for cashiers," responded Billy, with a loud laugh. "Reporters have to be content with plain hot stuff."

An hour later, as nearly as can be made out, Billy ran across Fatty Miller down Wall street way.

"Hello," said Fatty, with a touch of indignation in his tone, "didn't you have that financial story yesterday? How the mischief did you let us get left on it?"

"That isn't the point, Fatty," replied Billy. "You've missed it entirely. Suppose," and he backed the portly man against a building and punctuated his remarks by tapping on Fatty's expansive chest, "suppose there was an obstacle to the happiness of two friends of yours. Don't you think that obstacle should be removed?"

Fatty's eyes twinkled dully. He thought he foresaw one of Billy's jokes.

"I should say so on general principles," said he. "What's the special instance?"

"Fatty, I didn't call on you to discuss special in-

stances. General principles is all I want; but, for the sake of argument, suppose that this obstacle was a dried up, no account husk in the form of a man. What——”

The wild, ungoverned glow in Billy's eyes frightened the portly man. “See here, Billy,” he interrupted, “you mustn't talk like that even in joke. It doesn't sound well——”

“I never was so serious!”

“Then for heaven's sake go home and sleep it off.”

Billy drew back abruptly. His eyes were glassy for an instant, and then infinite cunning warmed them. “He thinks I'm drunk,” he muttered with a chuckle, and walked rapidly away.

“Full as a tick,” was Fatty's silent comment, as he went about his business.

Still later in the day Billy encountered a musician with whom he was well acquainted. This was uptown.

“My friend,” said Billy, gravely, “I have discovered my mission. Whenever I see an obstacle to happiness——” He knit his brows, stared a second, and turned away, walking rapidly, heedless of the jovial questions called after him.

Thursday, at a quarter to five in the afternoon, Billy is in a drug store not far from Guarda's hotel. “Something to straighten the nerves,” he says placidly to the clerk, and takes the dose mechanically. He asks for another article that the clerk demurs at putting up, whereupon Billy laughs in the most openhearted way. Event-

ually the clerk is persuaded, and Billy goes forth with the article in his pocket.

At five minutes to five he knocks softly at the door of Signor Giuseppe Napoli's room.

IV.

Cometh the victor, leading home his slaves,
 New conquests making of the gaping crowd.
Let pass ; my banner o'er no pageant waves ;
Exultant I in what my spirit craves——
 One captive's head before me bowed.

—Unknown.

Let alone the perturbation that lingered with Ordway through the afternoon. At five o'clock, prompt to the minute, his card was presented to Guarda. It seemed to him instantly when he stood before her that somehow she was different. Little given to observation in the matter of women's dress, he was aware that he had not seen her thus arrayed. Whether she were more dressed or less dressed than usual was beyond his ken; but never, he knew, had her beauty been set off so exquisitely. It was not now the regal beauty of the conquering prima, dazzling and impressive to a multitude of beholders. This was rather a special appeal, if we may imagine a beautiful woman playing to an audience of one, and that one an undistinguished member of her own profession. It was as if the woman, and not the singer, were presented to view, the apparel nicely adjusted to the atmosphere of intimacy which

may be found in any established home, and in a hotel parlor if the hostess there chooses to create it.

Not thus did Ordway analyze the lovely spectacle. He could not have told you whether the dress were white or pink, negligee or precise, and the possible subtleties of purpose in the costume passed him by; but they were not thrown away upon him. They never are thrown away on any man, are they? Is not the aim of the composer so to adjust his orchestration that the details escape attention in the emotions they arouse? Is not his art most successful when it conceals its own most patiently contrived devices? Surely; and so with regard to a woman's suggestion, through dress, of her ungarnished loveliness. The unobserving eye of man may ignore the clinging fabric, but his heart flutters, and she, who is all observation, will know why.

The manner—and that is to say, in this instance, the inward spirit of the woman—impressed itself with more distinctness upon the musician's sensitive nature. To-day he was supersensitive, as the result of Elise's troublesome insinuations, and his habit of self-analysis warned him not to be misled by appearances of no more than superficial significance. Yet he could not but observe that her hand clasped his with warmth that seemed more than ordinary cordiality, and that it lingered till it was an awkward matter to withdraw his own. Her eyes, too, were they not searching his with more than ordinary intensity? The air quivered with expectancy. She had sent for him, sent by a very special messenger.

Of course, then, there was some business of more than ordinary importance and interest to be discussed.

"You are quite well?" she inquired, "quite sure of yourself?"

"Decidedly," said he, and the tone would have been sufficient without the word.

Guarda laughed, but not spontaneously. "I have something very strange to tell you," she said. "I wonder, yes, I wonder, if you do not guess it?"

How her eyes essayed to pierce to the depths of his soul! He responded with a poor attempt at careless pleasantry. "I am a Yankee," he said, "and celebrated as the only one of his kind who does not guess."

"I wish you were not the exception," said she; "it would be easier."

The words conveyed no meaning to him. It was the manner, rather, that evoked a silent protest. Why should she drive so close to the line that, unknown to her, he had marked as forbidden territory?

"I have been working on your score," he said abruptly.

"There is no hurry for that, a month from now will do. Mr. Ordway, my friend," and suddenly the light of a new thought danced in her eyes; "I sent for you to tell you one thing," she went on hurriedly, "and now, quite on the spur of the moment, I decide to tell you another. Shall I?"

"Why not? I am here to listen."

"And not to speak?"

She waited and he looked at her blankly.

"Well, then," and she caught her breath with a little gasp, "you love me."

He said not a word. On the contrary, his lips crowded each other as if in determined effort to suppress utterance. Her cheeks paled perceptibly.

"It is so?" she demanded with eager insistence; "you must not dream that you can deny now what you have been unable to conceal all these months since Boxford. It is so, is it not?"

"It is," he answered huskily; "I could not help it."

The color returned to her cheeks in a flood.

"See!" she cried animatedly, "you have declared yourself; and I had supposed that I, a woman, should have to do so, that I should have to arrogate to myself the man's privilege, or duty—but no, you have spoken, and now the woman can answer. Herbert," and she went swiftly to him, putting her hands softly to his face, "I love you with all my soul!"

He might have seen what was coming. Looking back upon it at a later time, he knew that he had seen, in a way, but it was darkly, for he held stubbornly before the eyes of his spirit the mask of plain duty as he understood it. So now the revelation came to him with all the effect of an astounding surprise, and he knew not how to meet it.

"Guarda! Guarda!" he stammered, and his arms hung limp at his sides.

There had been dreams, waking dreams, for not al-

ways was he equal to forbidding them, of a scene akin to this. His fancy never could have pictured such a beginning, with the conscious and pretty comedy of making him appear to speak first, but the culmination, now at hand, had swam before his vision as the Elysium unattainable for him. It had seemed to him as if to clasp her in his arms, and press his lips to her brow, once only and then to part, would be compensation for life-long solitude thereafter. And now that Guarda invited him, that her sweet breath came softly to his lips, that her heart throbbed against his breast, he stood in agonized chill, unable to raise his hands, and amazed at himself.

Was Elise right? No; but this was a manner of man of which she and many another could have no conception.

The event moved swiftly. Agony of minutes was compressed into that briefest pause between his stammered cry and her response.

“Your Guarda, Herbert, yours if you will have me.”

She caught his arm impulsively and drew it about her waist.

“My Puritan,” she said, and laughed in his eyes, and kissed him on the lips.

“Guarda!” he cried again, and his voice choked. The barriers were thrown down at last. He pressed her to his heart and kissed her repeatedly, transported, yet troubled, wildly stirred, yet conscious that this was not the unclouded Elysium, the sublimated happiness that

had been his waking dream. Her Puritan! Aye, the false note was there, and it jarred even then when the physical man overwhelmed that finer substance to which he had been heir, and which may be called spiritual because it is purer than the merely moral.

"I do not understand," he said finally, holding her a bit from him and doubtless displaying clearly to her the tormenting doubts that were within him. Not that she could understand or appreciate them fully. If she had, she would not have said, "My Puritan."

"I know," she responded with a certain soothing condescension in her limpid tones, "but it is such a triumph to win you, to defeat you, to feel that everything has been brushed away by the power of love, that I almost dislike to tell you and make things clear. You are thinking of Giuseppe."

"Of Signor Napoli, yes," and in his heart he felt apprehensively that he was thinking of himself also. He was still amazed. Was this turbulence bliss? Was this what came of love, of the passion that dominates imperiously? Could it be that one may not know happiness at sight?

A wise question, Ordway. It is something to dwell upon when circumstances are more favorable to lucid, continuous reflection; when analysis may properly assume her function. Analysis has no business here, and you are guiltily conscious of the fact. Dismiss it, then, for now, close to this lovely woman who gives herself to you without apparent reserve, you cannot do else

than yield to the situation. You are under the influence of sex, Ordway. The world at large calls that love. The world is right enough, and if there is question as to the comprehensiveness of the definition, whether it really expresses the whole truth, this is no place or time to dispute about it.

"Signor Napoli," she repeated, laughing lightly, as if the name amused her. "Come, I must ring up the curtain on the last act of my comedy."

She led him to a sofa, where they sat, their hands clasped, she leaning ever toward him save as her dramatic nature and habit impelled her from time to time to gesture with head and shoulders.

"You have supposed that Giuseppe is my husband," said she.

"Certainly. Everybody has said so."

"And everybody believes it save myself and him. Faithful Giuseppe! His latter days have been luxurious to a degree he never dreamed of till the reality was pounced upon him. He is my employee, Herbert, my servant."

"It is still incomprehensible," said he, when she paused.

"Have you not heard," she asked, "that I am, or was, rich?"

"Yes, that you were rich. I heard also that you had lost your fortune and that you——" he halted, confused, and she laughed as she finished for him.

"That I married poor old Giuseppe for his money."

"That is the general understanding. It has been published, not in so many blunt words, but substantially that. I have never heard that you denied it."

"I never have, but what did you think of me for that supposed marriage?"

"I—I regretted it, of course, but I never disparaged you in my thoughts. That you had done it was justification enough for me."

"Ah!" she cried gladly, "I might have known that would be your comment! Now, listen, Herbert, and I will tell you all about it. I was young, talented and alone. I need not hesitate to add that I was attractive, for my money could account for that. There was abundant evidence of my attractiveness, or that of my money, when I went to Europe to complete my studies and acquire the prestige necessary for recognition in my own country. Do I need to dwell on the misery that my unprotected status called upon me? Surely not. You can imagine it. My eye then was single for success in my career, as it has been since. I was the merest slip of a girl when I made the great resolution of my life that nothing, nothing, and again nothing should be permitted to stand in the way of the triumph that I knew I was gifted to achieve. Men over there, managers, impressarios, and the like, told me with brutal frankness that success lay in the favor of this or that nobleman or wealthy patron of the art. Through this or another I could gain a hearing at this or that opera house. I never had a moment's doubt, Herbert. That was not

the way to my success, but refusing to take it, I found that it became a hindrance as well as a source of mortifying annoyance. Do not think that dishonorable proposals alone were made to me. There were men of wealth and title who would have married me, but I would not marry. I loved nothing but my career, and I would not entertain any proposition that threatened even remotely to hinder it. In my distress and disappointment I racked my brain for a way to shield myself from annoyance. ‘If I could only pretend to be married!’ I cried again and again, only to perceive the next moment that a husband must be in evidence, or the pretence would avail little.

“Then I chanced upon Giuseppe Napoli. He had been a servant in a noble family all his life. The family died out, one member after another dropping away in rapid succession, and at last Giuseppe was without place or employer. He had been everywhere, and by force of habit had the most impressively dignified demeanor. Among the localities in everywhere that he had visited was Monte Carlo. His master had left him a fortune ample for his needs, but Giuseppe was not content to retire to a village or a modest *pension*. He must disport himself *en gentilhomme*, as befitted a man of independent means. That required more money, and Giuseppe knew how it was to be obtained without sacrificing an iota of his ponderous dignity. He invented or bought a roulette system, and in short order was reduced to beggary. It was then that I happened upon

him. An acquaintance with whom I was staying at Monte Carlo pointed him out and told me his story. I had a brilliant idea, and I acted on it without further meditation. I went privately to Giuseppe and offered him a life of distinguished ease, plenty of variety, no work to speak of, with salary ample to his supposed relation to me and the promise of an annuity if the time should come when I should choose to dispense with him. The time has arrived, Herbert."

"I seem to be no less astonished than at first," he said. "Is it possible that this device passed unsuspected in Europe?"

"It took some management," she answered, "at first and in places where Giuseppe had been seen with his master, but some months after he had stopped shaving his upper lip there was no difficulty whatever. It was I who perceived the necessity of a moustache," and she laughed gaily.

"And did this fantastic device accomplishd its purpose?"

Guarda stood up suddenly and the jubilant expression on her face turned to bitterness.

"No!" she cried, "not altogether. It prevented you from speaking; you, the one man in all the world whom I wanted to speak; but the others have seemed to presume upon me with callous indifference that they assumed I also felt. Only yesterday one from whom—one who—it was only yesterday, last evening, that I was confronted by a proposition—Herbert, it decided me to

explain all to you. I had watched you, wondering, yes, amused at first, for you never deceived me. I knew how you felt and I marveled at your restraint. The time came when I knew that I loved you, for that primarily, perhaps, but ah! the joy of perceiving that with you there would be no sacrifice needed! We will lay the world at our feet, you and I. You with your compositions, I singing them. The glory will be doubled. Does it not set you on fire to think of it?"

Impulsively and gracefully she knelt before him, resting her arms upon his knees, and looking up into his face with eyes aglow.

"See!" she said, "the prima donna kneels to you, the composer; to you, the one man who has never affronted her with his love."

V.

But in these nice sharp quilletts of the law,
Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw.

—Shakespeare.

It was indeed wonderful. Ordway thrilled at the spectacle of which he was a part, and laid his hands gently on hers; but all he said was, "I marvel at the steadfastness of your purpose."

"Why should you?" she demanded, "you who are equally steadfast? What you really marvel at is my ingenuity and my audacity. They were necessary to me. I have ever been in need of all the ingenuity I could command, and that," here her face darkened again, "that was what disappointed me so in Billy. He has just the talent that could be most useful to me."

"Perhaps," suggested Ordway, cautiously. "Billy might be induced to change his mind now."

"No!" she said decidedly, "I have done with Billy. He has cut my pride, for I had led him on. Oh, yes, Herbert," as she noted his startled look, "I led Billy on deliberately from the first meeting with him in Boxford. I felt his genius. He was a newspaper man, a critic, as I supposed, and therefore he had to be charmed.

Do you not see? It is, or was, a part of my career to charm by personal grace as well as by voice. The instant I saw his name and paper on his card I knew that here was a man to be won. It was so easy," and she laughed a little. "An opportunity had arisen by which Billy might do a favor to a friend. He tried to conceal his real purpose from me, but he was transparent as glass. Of course I toyed with the matter a little, and of course I sang your piece——"

It was Guarda's turn to be startled, for Ordway dropped her hands and arose abruptly.

"You said—I thought," he stammered, "that the music won its own way."

"Why, so it did," she cried, rising hastily and caressing his cheeks; "but, don't you see, that was good fortune for both of us. You don't doubt me, Herbert? Would I have sung your piece repeatedly and have asked you to compose for me if I did not have faith in your genius? Don't you see that I am honest with you?"

"Yes," he admitted with extraordinary reluctance. "I see, but your words seemed to imply——" and he hesitated.

"That I would have sung the aria in Boxford whatever its merit or lack of it," she concluded for him. "Yes, Herbert, the music would have had to be atrocious if I declined to sing it, for Billy had to be put under obligation. That it proved to be not atrocious but divinely beautiful was a joyous surprise to me and

so fortunate for both of us. Don't you think so, Herbert, my lover?"

He nodded absently. At the moment his thoughts and feelings were with Billy. She had led him on!

Doubtless it was his palpable absence of mind that piqued her and drove her, in her inconsistent bitterness about Billy, to further revelation of her policy of man-snaring.

"And after that there was still Billy, the clever newspaper man, the genius of audacity and invention. I wanted him, that is, his talents, at my command."

"Do you mean," he interposed, frowning a little in spite of an effort to appear unmoved, "that you tried to make Billy fall in love with you?"

"No," said Guarda, and she pouted as might the tenderest, most unsophisticated girl of your acquaintance. "Why should I? That's the man's lookout, isn't it? It doesn't seem to make any difference anyway. Men have fallen in love with me without let or hindrance from me. You did, Herbert."

How she dwelt upon his name! In one breath it was as if she had always addressed him thus, in another as if there were a sense of security in it, as if thus she should hold him to her. Did the all-conquering Guarda have her doubts? It may be. She had observed much, she thought much in her way, and she had admitted that this man before her was not like the rest.

"Yes!" he cried in a sudden rush of emotion, and he drew her to him, "I did, and you did not seek me."

"Not till I had to, dear," and she gasped a little laugh that seemed to be all happiness. If there was a breath of relief in it, it escaped him. The influence was strong upon him, and he began to revel in it when a disturbing thought of an entirely new, even grotesque, kind cast a cloud upon his brow. Instantly Guarda, ever sensitive to surface manifestations, demanded to know what mattered with him.

"I don't know that it is anything," he answered with great hesitation. "I have no real knowledge of law——"

"I thought you had a great deal——"

"Guarda!" and his tone was significant of danger; "the law I obeyed was higher, I hope, than the statutes."

"Yes, I admired you for it," she said faintly.

"There is a phase of this odd device," he went on, "that has its possibility of trouble or annoyance. I don't know. Perhaps I am taking fright at a man of straw."

"That is what my supposed husband is."

"It may not be so in law."

Guarda was startled in earnest. "Why!" she exclaimed, "what can you be thinking of?"

"Newspaper paragraphs that I have happened to see, and explanations that Billy has made of them when I asked him."

"Billy doesn't know everything."

"He knew his ground in this matter. You have introduced Giuseppe as your husband, have you not?"

"Time and again. I've had to. That was a necessary part of the device."

"Certainly; but you have so introduced him in this State, have you not?"

"Surely; a dozen times."

"Well," said Ordway, soberly, "it is the law in this State that if a man introduces a woman as his wife, thus acknowledging her, she becomes his wife in law without religious or civil ceremony. I presume the same ruling would apply to a woman who introduced a man as her husband."

Guarda drew slowly back and sank into a chair.

"The question," Ordway continued relentlessly, for it was his mental habit to face a problem in all its bearings and seek rather than evade its difficulties, "the question is all the time arising in will contests, you know. There can be no doubt as to the law when it is the man who acknowledges the relationship. Common law wife, I believe, is the legal term applied to her. How the law would apply in this case I confess I have no clear idea."

"It is monstrous!" she exclaimed.

He stood before her, brows knit, hands clasped behind his back. "All this may be extremely ridiculous," he said, "but I am sure it should be thought of. I should hate to see you take a false step."

She laughed uncomfortably. "There is such a thing as divorce," said she, "but divorce from Giuseppe! How absurd!"

"Is the idea any more absurd than marriage with him?"

"Yes, because——" she did not finish her thought, but broke forth with passion, "it should be such a simple thing as I had planned it. Nothing more than the discharge of a servant, a retirement of him to liberty and a pension. I cannot believe that I have run into any serious entanglement."

"Perhaps not; I certainly hope not. We can tell by consulting competent authority, and maybe we can satisfy ourselves now. Do you say that the secret is shared by no one?"

"Absolutely no one; not even by my manager."

"How about your maid?"

"Elise? She knows nothing. She may suspect, for she is a remarkably keen person, but she has no knowledge of the facts."

"She may have wheedled or badgered the truth from Giuseppe."

"True, for she is sharp and persistent. But why do you ask about Elise?"

"Because her word might be useful if she were acquainted with the facts. Of course, you know, I am speculating, foolishly, perhaps."

"I hope you are, Herbert." To her came a new thought, and she brightened, rising and going again close to him. "The law of New York, with its monstrous eccentricities, will not apply elsewhere, in England, for example. Let us go there and get rid of Giu-

seppe according to my programme. Then we can be married, dear, and tell the newspapers all about it. What an advertisement! There never was such a romantic story in real life. Don't you see?"

"Yes," he answered, forcing a smile to avoid the wry face he must otherwise have pulled, "but we'll agree to discuss that matter of advertising, won't we?"

"Oh, yes indeed! I shall expect you to have any number of brilliant ideas. Even if you are not inventive you ought to have acquired considerable facility from your contact with Billy. But," and she turned from him before he could make one response or another, "I am curious to know whether Elise has divined the truth. And there can be nothing in your horrid law to prevent me from giving Giuseppe his warning now. His usefulness, if ever he had any, has departed, and I don't want to see him around any longer. I will have them both in here and explain the case, kindly to Giuseppe, of course, and I will see that Elise, whatever she has learned, keeps her faith with me."

Guarda touched a bell, and Ordway, feeling a sudden embarrassment at the suggestion of Elise's presence, went to the pianoforte, where he made a pretence at looking over some music.

"Elise," said Guarda, when the girl came in, "is m'sieur in his room?"

"Yes, madame. He went in an hour ago, saying that he was fatigued. It is the hour he sleeps."

"And it is about the time when he should be waked

to dress for dinner. He is doubtless rested by now. Call him, Elise."

"Yes, madame. Is it that he is to come here?"

"Certainly, and, Elise, I wish you to return with him."

"Yes, madame."

The girl withdrew, and Guarda said, "I don't believe she even suspects."

"I can't help wishing a little that she knew," said Ordway, uneasily.

"Never mind, my thoughtful, pure hearted lover!" she cried, and again she sought his side and twined her arm about him. They stood thus for a moment. Then, the hardly audible voice of Elise:

"Madame! madame!"

They turned, separating suddenly, but Elise was not in sight. The sound of her choking voice and her stumbling steps came from beyond the door. Guarda hastened toward it, but she had taken but three paces when the door was thrown open and Elise halted, pallor on her cheeks, terror in her eyes, upon the threshold. Her lips moved, but they merely framed the word "Madame," and no sound save a gurgle issued.

"Elise! Girl!" cried Guarda; "what is it? Speak!"

"Dead, madame," Elise gasped with difficulty; "m'sieu is dead!"

VI.

It is one of the strange decrees of fate that those who seem most to be needed are taken away. At the moment of his greatest usefulness to his country a wise ruler is struck down by an assassin; a woman blessed with maternity, leaves her young; and meantime imbeciles encumber the highways. One needs be a philosopher to view these things with equanimity.

—The Hermit.

For one almost imperceptible instant Guarda stood motionless. Her back was to Ordway, and so he lost such expression of shock as may have crossed her brow, but when she turned and ran to him with wide open arms, her features manifested exultant delight unalloyed by anything save tempestuous excitement.

“Herbert!” she cried, “he is dead! There is nothing now to hinder.”

She was in his arms, palpitant, eager, elated. She saw the awful gravity of his face, but she mistook the tears that came as far as his eyelids and were crowded back, for the manifestation of unutterable joy akin to her own. Ah, Guarda, you who were so keen of view in many respects, what pity, for your own sake, that you could not have penetrated a little deeper into the

soul of this man for whom you made a place in your scheme of vast ambition! It was a dangerous mental habit that of wilfully subordinating everything to your career. Thus triumphant careers are made, it is true, but at dismal sacrifices of things that you, aye, you, Guarda, were sensitive and refined enough to prize. You had fixed your imperious will upon this man's love, and the habit of sweeping away every consideration that seemed to thwart your desires blinded you to the tragic fact that the tears in his eyes sprung impulsively to that unwonted verge because of grief over a breaking idol. All through this momentous scene, Guarda, you have been dealing blows against the idol that he had set up in your figure, and it may be that this was not the most crushing of them all; but to him, with his inheritance, his quick perception of the fitness of things, which is a definition of right, it seemed no less than horrible to exult in the presence of death. And that it was you, his idol, who could so exult!

"Guarda," said he, most unsteadily, "it may be death, and even then—but think, he may be in a swoon and needing help."

"But she has seen; she says he is dead."

Not then, nor perhaps at any time, did the realization of his attitude come to her. Poor old Giuseppe had been transformed unexpectedly into a possible obstacle to her desires, and the obstacle had been removed. Why not rejoice?

"We must see for ourselves," said Ordway, firmly

now, and she shrank from his arms as one withdraws unwittingly in the presence of a master.

Elise was still trembling at the door, the frank passion of her mistress not availing yet to shut out the horror of what she had seen in that distant room. Ordway addressed her. "I have seen the name of Dr. Sinclair on the building next north to this," he said; "go to him as fast as you can and bring him. If he is not in notify the office and have a physician summoned instantly. Is it through these rooms?"

"Yes, m'sieu, at the end of the suite," and Elise went forth hurriedly without so much as a glance at her mistress to get her sanction to his command.

Ordway hastened through the rooms, and Guarda followed him. It was not a pleasant spectacle they gazed upon. Giuseppe lay on his back on the bed, one foot on the floor. Jaws were parted and eyes staring. His sallow face was ashen. Guarda drew a gasping breath, but she went to the bedside and stood there while Ordway felt the old man's pulse, listened for heart beats, and made such other examination as lay within his ken to do.

"I think it is all over with him," he said at last.

Hearing no response of any kind from Guarda, he turned apprehensively to her, but she was composed; her handkerchief pressed to her lips. It was merely inquiry that her eyes directed to him.

"There is no need," he said gently, "that you should be distressed with what must follow. I will see the

doctor and make all necessary arrangements. Shall I explain—that is, say that Giuseppe was your servant?"

He was leading her back to the parlor.

"Do just what you think best, Herbert," she answered, "but let there be no needless delay."

He inclined his head, and, having brought her to the door of her room, turned about at once and went back to the death chamber. Less than a minute passed when Elise opened the door for Dr. Sinclair.

The physician made his tests and announced that Giuseppe was dead. "Heart failure, I suppose," he said. Then he asked some perfunctory questions and went his way. Ordway sought Elise.

"Did you say he complained of fatigue?" he asked by way of opening a conversation that might involve delicate allusions. The girl had recovered remarkably from her shock.

"No more than usual, m'sieu," she answered glibly. "He was no giant, this Giuseppe. Madame has told me, m'sieu," and she dropped him a pert courtesy as if to assure him that henceforth she looked to him for commands.

Ordway clenched his teeth and held his breath for an instant. "Do you know whether he was a Roman Catholic?" he asked.

"Yes, m'sieu, most devout."

"Very well; I have a friend who is a priest. I will go to him to arrange for the appropriate service."

"Pardon, m'sieu, but you are also to see the under-

taker, is it not? Madame said so."

"And she gave you a message for me?"

"Yes, m'sieu, if you would be so kind, tell the undertaker to remove the body to-night. It can wait quite well in his shop, is it not?"

"I will attend to it. You may tell madame so."

"M'sieu goes now, then, but m'sieu will return as soon as all is arranged. Madame said she wished M'sieu Ordway to return."

He inclined his head gravely and went out. All the arrangements were made, including burial from church at ten o'clock of the following Saturday morning. Then Ordway gave some thought to himself. He was deeply troubled. During his calls upon the undertaker and the priest, he knew that trouble was with him; now he sought to understand it, and the better to do so he went to his rooms. There had been a series of shocks to his finer sensibilities, and there had been a turbulence of emotion that should be associated with and attributed to love. He had supposed that love reciprocated meant happiness.

"It must be so," he said peremptorily to himself, and thrills were reawakened by recalling Guarda's lavish caresses. "Genuine, deep love," said he, "will make allowances. What authority have I to set up standards to which all others, Guarda included, must conform? Is it not the one reasonable and right thing to rejoice at this wonderful good fortune? The love of Guarda! How I have longed for it! And it is mine! mine! That

is the matter to think of," and thus persuading himself he went up to the home of himself and his struggles, of Billy and his struggles.

Billy was there, sitting alone in the darkness, and it was not until Ordway struck a light that he saw his friend's haggard face and wild eyes.

"Ha! you here?" said Ordway, and again he was shocked, for, with all his experience he never had seen Billy looking like this. "What's up? Waiting for me to go to dinner with you?"

"No," replied Billy, hoarsely, and with the tremulousness of suppressed excitement, "but I've been waiting for you to tell you about it. Thought you'd never come! I had the lights up till I thought you might think I was afraid of the dark. I'm not. It's all the same to me, light or dark, so long as there's light enough to accomplish something worth while."

"See here, old man," and Ordway was vaguely apprehensive, for though he thought of the cause that usually lay back of Billy's mental disturbances he could find nothing familiar in this manner of babbling, "there's something wrong. What is it?"

"I did it," replied Billy, clenching his fists on his knees and staring with horrible intenseness. "It wasn't wrong, but we won't argue the matter. My opinion is as good as yours. The point is that I did it, and now you won't have to hold aloof from Guarda any longer."

Ordway was speechless, enthralled with terrible fear. Billy laughed harshly.

"You don't understand it," he went on. "Such a thing don't come to a man's mind all at once. It didn't to mine, but it got there, and I did it—did it for you, old fellow—and now there's no obstacle to your happiness. He's out of the way——"

"Billy!" gasped Ordway, leaping to his friend and shaking him in the mad hope of wrenching him from his trance. "Come to your senses, Billy! Don't talk like that! For God's sake, be sensible!"

"I am sensible. Take your hands off, I tell you, and let me explain. It's getting late, and I've got to hurry."

Ordway desisted, for this seemed rational. "Explain, then," he said, "if there's anything in this delirium that needs it."

"Well," and Billy seemed to take a grip on his nerves, "I know you love Guarda. Don't interrupt! I loved her. That's passed, for I was fool enough to insult her with a proposition that she rejected as she ought to. I didn't forget that she was a married woman. I played on the chance that she didn't care for that wreck who was bound to her. She doesn't care for him. I believe she loves you. Anyhow, you have your opportunity now, for there's no obstacle between you and her. I've been a worthless sot, Bert, but you can thank me for clearing your road."

It was impossible to listen longer. "Billy," said Ordway, quaking again with fearful alarm, "is it possible that you refer to Giuseppe Napoli?"

"Yes; of course—Guarda's husband."

"But he isn't her husband, Billy."

"Isn't her husband?" shouted Billy, starting up; then a ghastly smile came upon his face. "Right," he added; "wasn't would be the word, for he's dead."

"He wasn't her husband, Billy."

"It's a lie!" cried the crazed man. "I won't have it so. I will have it that I accomplished something worth while. Listen, Bert. I'll tell you. Don't say be calm to me. This is no time for calmness, but I want to tell you that I did it in calmness. Thought it all out when I was sober. I haven't touched a drop to-day. I went about holding myself back to gather strength for it, physical strength, understand, for my will didn't waver, not once after I saw that it was the thing to do. It was at five o'clock——"

"Five o'clock!" echoed Ordway, choking.

"That was the hour. Chosen for me by fate, I suppose, for when I knocked and he didn't answer, and I went in, I found him asleep. He was waiting for me! Waiting with his throat bare for my hands! A pistol may miss fire, you know, or a man may quiver and spoil his aim; a knife may break at the handle, or strike a button and be deflected. Nature's weapons were the best. I had thought it all out, and that was why I took hours to gather strength. I had it. If he had been a powerful young man I might have had to resort to artificial weapons, but he yielded to me as if he was only too glad to give up his useless life. It's all right, Bert. It was the only way, and matters had come to

such a pass with me that it was the only thing left that I could do for you. It isn't every friend who would do as much; but I'd do it again, and I am glad! glad! glad! Good-bye."

His frenzy left him suddenly, and his voice choked as he held out his hand. Ordway took it and gripped hard.

"Billy," said he, fixing his friend's eyes, "this horrible raving is incredible. I don't believe a word——"

"You don't need to, then! Call on her and she'll tell you."

"Listen, Billy! You're not going out. You're not fit to work to-night."

"I'm not going to work. I've quit."

"Then you'll stay here with all the more reason. I'll bring you something from a drug store to make you sleep——"

"I've got it," cried Billy, frantic again, and beginning to try to loosen Ordway's grasp. "I'm no fool, Bert. I've provided for all contingencies, I tell you. I'd rather you believed me. Will you when I use the plainest language? I tell you, old man, that for your sake I am a murderer! I killed old Napoli at five o'clock this afternoon!"

Perspiration was glistening on Ordway's brow, but still he clenched his teeth and tightened his grip on Billy's arms. It was a maniac he wrestled with, and not all his country-bred strength was equal to the grievous task. Billy made a feint at yielding, then suddenly

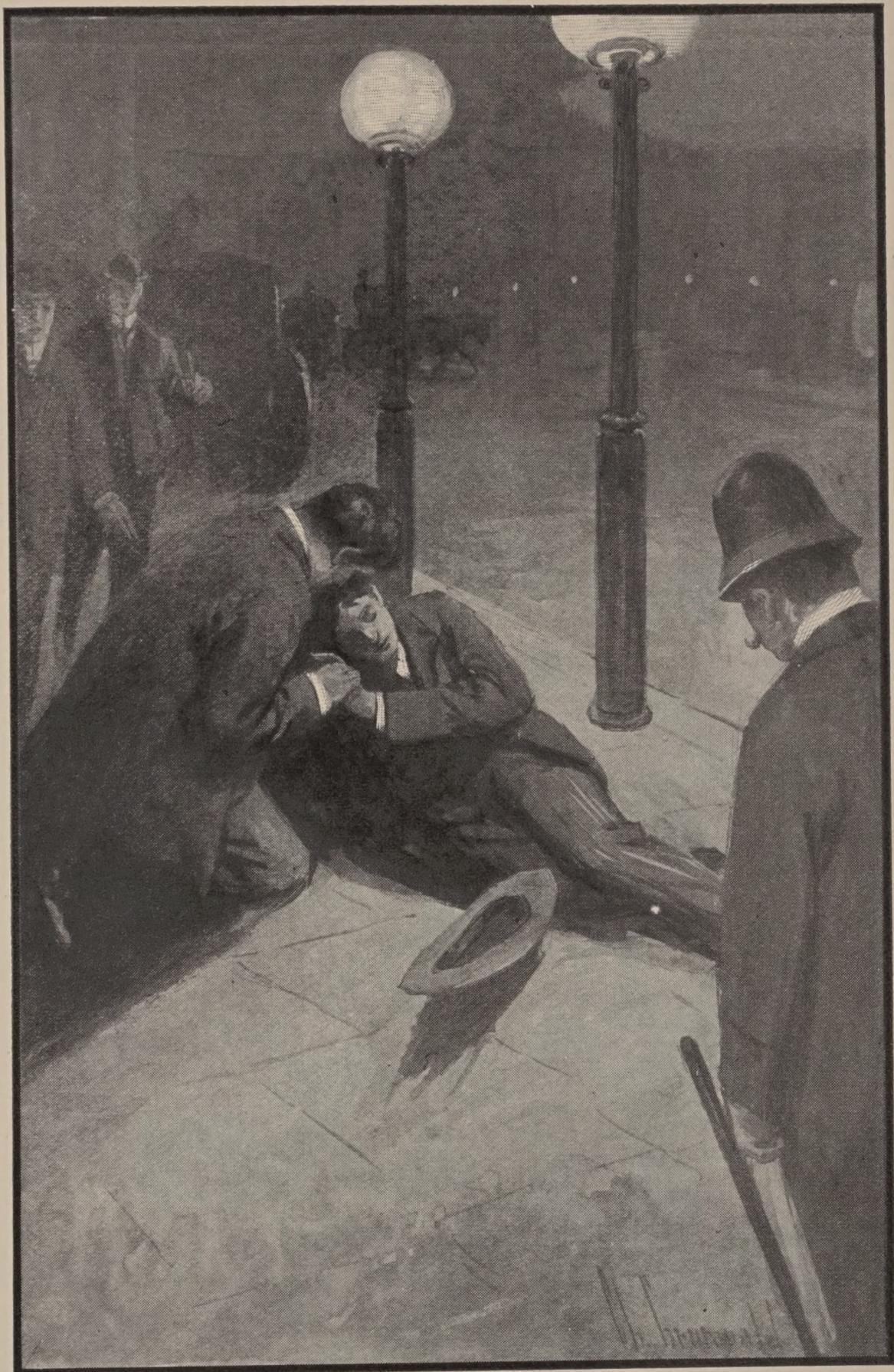
wrenched one arm free and dealt Ordway a stunning blow between the eyes. Ordway staggered, tripped upon a book that had slipped to the floor, and fell. Billy gained his freedom and dashed for the door. As Ordway fell his face struck a sharp corner of the table, and blood went trickling down his cheek.

"Billy! Billy!" he called, in anguish, and stumbled to his feet to follow. He heard the reporter leaping down the stairs. Dizzy, reeling, Ordway caught at the bannister and fairly slid down the flights, but Billy gained on him, and when he issued from the door he saw his friend at the curb across the street. Billy had paused where the light from a street lamp was strongest. He was examining and opening a small parcel that he took from his pocket.

Ordway called to him and ran, but before he was half way over Billy had carried his hand to his mouth and gulped down what he put there, the trifle that the drug clerk had demurred at selling without a prescription; and when Ordway came to him, he held out his hands in welcome. There was a wry smile on his face, for the dose was bitter; but it was a smile of infinite affection.

"It's all right now, Bert," said he, in quite a rational way. "It's down, and (shivering) getting in its work. I'm sorry you're hurt, but it's only skin deep. Mine is deeper. I had to hit you——"

He began to tremble violently, and he offered no re-



"Cheer up, Billy!" he faltered. "We'll bring you out of it."
See page 325.

sistance as Ordway took him in his arms and laid him down. Swiftly came a convulsive shudder.

"Help! help! For God's sake, help!" cried Ordway, with all his voice.

"Help for yourself, Bert, if you need it," gasped Billy. "I've no use for it; but I'm glad you're here, glad, old fellow, for there's one thing more to tell you."

Another terrible shudder interrupted him, and after that he spoke incoherently. Men were running toward them from one place and another.

"A doctor, quick!" said Ordway to the first who arrived, and the man dashed away.

Billy's lips were moving, and his eyes were fixed upon Ordway in lingering appeal. Ordway bent close.

"Cheer up, Billy," he faltered. "We'll bring you out of it."

The reporter shook his head feebly, and, obeying the sign from his eyes, Ordway placed his ear to the dying man's lips. He heard nothing comprehensible—the disconnected wanderings of a mind setting forth on its long journey.

"Pianoforte," whispered Billy; "all contingencies—expenses—opus eighty-one."

The end came a moment later. Ordway, on his knees, had both arms around his friend. He was sobbing hysterically.

VII.



—Beethoven, op. 81.

"Isn't there something more that we can do? We all liked him, Mr. Ordway. There are some other things that have to be done, you know."

It was kind-hearted Mrs. Brewer, the janitor's wife, who thus aroused Ordway from the stupor in which he sat beside the pianoforte. An age had passed, somewhat less than an hour by the clock, but an age, nevertheless. Impulses of vital importance may have birth and death in an hour. In that brief space the current of a strong life may be changed, love may languish, hate spring to mature growth. A revolution may be accomplished in sixty minutes.

There had been the awe-stricken, gaping crowd; but in it were friendly faces and helping hands. An ambulance, summoned by a well-meaning observer, had come on its fruitless errand, and gone. The janitor, trembling though he was with sincere grief, had acted with judgment and dispatch to the end that the legal formalities incident to the death of a man in the street were

hastened, and Billy's worn-out frame had been taken to his own chamber, where it now lay. Ordway had assisted physically, and when there seemed to be no more lifting and carrying to do he had sunk into his chair, motionless and silent.

Mrs. Brewer's question aroused him.

"Yes," he said, blankly at first, but in increasing firmness, "You have been very kind—yes, there are other things to do; but, thank you, Mrs. Brewer, if you please, I prefer to do them."

She gave him a motherly look of compassion, and put her hand upon his arm. "It is too much for you," she suggested; "nobody will expect it of you. My husband will—"

"Mrs. Brewer," he interrupted, gently, "it is the last opportunity I have to do anything for Billy. I know you loved him, but you must let me have my way. I cannot bear to think of anybody else doing these necessary things. I will let you know—honestly, I will—if there is anything you can do for me."

So it was Ordway who visited the undertaker, his second call there that Thursday evening, and a clergyman; and who later went down to the office where Billy had been employed. Before he set forth on these errands, there was a terrible moment in his room. Mrs. Brewer had allowed herself to be dismissed, her husband had gone before her, and Ordway was alone. He was mechanically brushing his hat, that had been knocked off in his struggle with Billy, when his eye fell upon

his work table. There lay the full score of his aria, all the orchestral parts, the pianoforte transcription from which Guarda had learned it, the incompletely completed score for small band, and even the sheets on which he had written his first sketch. It was all there, every scrap that belonged to it, and all in methodical array as he had left it at the end of his day's work upon it. His brows contracted, and there flashed in his eyes a fire that never before had burned there. Brush and hat were hastily laid aside. One stride took him to the table. He grasped the sheets that comprised the full score and crunched them in his hands as if he would tear them to shreds; and in that attitude he paused as if turned to stone. For many long seconds he stood thus, and the perspiration rolled from his brow. Drip, drip, it fell upon the paper he held.

"Impulse! mad impulse!" he muttered, at last, and laid the sheets down. "It will be better, mean more, with deliberation. It can wait."

From that moment, which left him with a startling sense of exhaustion, something that he intended to do served as a stimulus through all the mournful business he had to transact. His steps never lagged, but when grief and weariness of spirit seemed about to cast him prostrate, he said ever to himself, "Not yet. There is something to be done—a little thing, but it must be done, and it must not be the deed of mad impulse."

At the newspaper office, to his surprise and unspeakable relief, he found that not a man to whom he told the

sad story was disposed to make it a matter of news. Of course, he did not tell the whole story. That Mr. Jameson had died suddenly he had meant to be the limit of his information; but it proved impossible to keep from these shocked and sympathetic men that it was a case of suicide. Word went round the busy room quickly, and every man left his desk to gather at the gate and listen to the few questions and answers that passed between Ordway and the night editor. They were quick—ah! so quick—with not only expressions of compassion, but with offers of assistance. They would do everything, take charge of the arrangements; and Ordway, choking, held up his hand.

"I hope you'll pardon me, gentlemen," he said; "but I feel that this is my private affair—mine and Billy's. I recognize your interest and rights, and have done the best I knew how to adapt the arrangements to them. I told the clergyman that such simple service as he might deem appropriate would be held where we lived together at eleven o'clock on Saturday morning. I thought that would come as near to an off hour for you gentlemen as could be chosen."

From the newspaper office Ordway went back to his rooms. Mrs. Brewer was on the watch for him, but he would have called on her. He had a favor to ask. Yes, he would drink a cup of tea. He did not tell her so, but he remembered then that he had not been to dinner. The good woman knew what was wise for him; that care must be given to the living, and that

by gross means, no matter how the wounded spirit might shrink from so selfish a thing as food. She said nothing, but she placed food before him, and he ate. Thus refreshed, he was conscious of a profounder calmness than he had felt before. Then he asked his favor. He would like to put something on the furnace fire.

"To be sure!" said Mrs. Brewer; and though she wondered, she asked no question, but bustled forth to call her husband. The janitor came in.

"I'll burn up anything you like, Mr. Ordway," said he. "Have you got it with you?"

"It's in my room. I'll bring it down; but I want to put it on the fire myself."

"Certainly, sir," and the janitor and his wife looked at each other and shook their heads while Ordway was gone. He returned with an armful of music paper—his aria, scores, parts and sketches, every scrap that belonged to it. Down in the basement, the janitor looking wonderingly on, he placed the sheets one at a time on the flames; and when the last had roared itself to crackling ash, he said, "Thank you," quietly, and went back to his room.

It was time to rest, but not in bed. He sat at his table and looked sombrely about the room. His friend had been there very little with him, but Billy seemed to be a part of every inch of it. A long time passed—much more than an hour—but it was not an age; merely the fractional beginning of one. At last—he had been looking fixedly at the pianoforte without seeing it—he

began to muse on those last incoherent words of Billy's. "Pianoforte—all contingencies—expenses—opus eighty-one." Had there been some meaning in that? Could the blanks be filled in with words that would connect them rationally? He stood up to look at the instrument more closely. There was a bound volume of Beethoven's sonatas lying on the cover, and, instantly he saw it, the partial significance of Billy's words flashed upon him and drew a sob to his throat. Opus eighty-one—the "Farewell" sonata. But it was not until Ordway had opened the volume to read silently through that exquisite first movement that he understood all that Billy had tried to say.

Pinned to the first page of that sonata were two bank notes, one for fifty dollars, the other for ten. The pin also held in place a scrap of paper, on which was written:

"Keep within this, old fellow; it's more than I'm worth. Billy."

VIII.

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

—William Congreve.

An eager desire possessed Ordway on the morning following. It seemed that there might be one more possible thing that he could do for Billy. The matter could not be worse than it was; it might be better. With this in view, feverishly hopeful, aching with apprehension, he called on Dr. Sinclair. The physician recognized him.

"Doctor," said he, "I understood you to say that Napoli's death was to be attributed to heart failure."

"It is the most natural supposition," the doctor responded, "from the man's evident age, and from the fact that there was no evidence of other organic difficulty or acute disease."

"Is no other supposition possible?"

The physician looked his visitor gravely in the eyes for a moment. "For instance?" he asked.

"Violence," said Ordway.

An anxious pause followed. "My examination," said Dr. Sinclair, "was directed to little more than determining that life was extinct. If you had any suspicions you should have spoken of them at the time."

"I had none, doctor—I have none now; but I cannot tell you how anxious I am to be assured that the man's death was wholly due to natural causes."

"A post-mortem would likely show whether poisoning had taken place——"

"There was no poisoning, Dr. Sinclair."

"You speak very positively, sir, while you suggest the most serious possibilities. Better be frank with me. As it is, you have insinuated so much that I am not inclined to let the matter pass without further examination."

"That is just what I want, doctor. I will be as frank as is necessary."

"I don't like the implied qualification in your answer. What evidence of unnatural death do you want me to look for?"

"Strangulation."

The doctor arched his brows and appeared to be deeply disturbed. "I do not think I could have failed to notice anything of that sort," he said. "Will you go with me at once?"

In short order they were at the undertaker's, and the doctor applied himself with professional thoroughness to his grawsome task. At last he stood up, and Ordway nerved himself for the verdict.

"There was no strangulation," said the doctor. "Nothing could be more certain than that."

"Thank God!" gasped Ordway.

The restraint he had been exercising gave way per-

ceptibly, and he appeared more deeply agitated than at any previous moment.

"You feared that there had been crime," said the doctor, directly. "It was not the crime you suggested. Do you think of any other way?"

"No; it was this way, or the whole thing was a delusion."

"You'd better explain that, Mr. Ordway. To me alone, you understand. I have a right now to be wholly satisfied."

"Yes, doctor," and Ordway thought a moment. "I will put a hypothetical question," he resumed, "and if it does not satisfy you, perhaps I will consent to be more specific. Suppose a man whose mind was disordered had entered Napoli's room subsequent to his death; suppose this man had seen that Napoli was dead. Is it not possible that he would go away under the impression that he had killed him?"

"Possible, certainly," replied the doctor, without hesitation. "Anything is possible in the way of delusions. I should say that if this hypothetical man already had the delusion that the deceased was his enemy——"

"Yes," said Ordway, eagerly; "that was the case."

"Then the most probable result would be that the man would imagine that he had killed the deceased. He might even have gone through the motions, you know—put his hands to the dead man's throat——"

"I won't think it!"

"I wouldn't if it distresses you. There's no evidence

that Napoli was touched subsequent to his death from heart failure."

"Then are you satisfied, doctor?"

"That there was no crime? Yes; and if you don't care to volunteer anything further, I will ask no questions."

Ordway begged the physician's indulgence, and they separated without further discussion, the inquirer so profoundly relieved that he was almost happy.

When Saturday morning came, and neither postman nor messenger brought any word from Ordway, Guarda was sorely troubled. The doubts as to the completeness of her conquest, that had surprised her during her memorable scene with the composer, returned to depress and irritate her. She had heard from him indirectly. A man from the undertaker's had called and told Elise about the funeral arrangements. The maid's frank pumping had elicited the information that the man had been sent at Ordway's request. Guarda wondered if Ordway stayed away because of some strange sentiment incomprehensible to less sensitive mortals? It seemed to her that his place was at her side. There was no occasion for mourning; it did not seem that the most finical taste could demand any marked departure from ordinary demeanor; but Ordway was—Ordway, and that meant that there could be no certainty as to what that absurd but wholly noble young man would do or think.

It might lie within his view of duty and propriety to

attend Giuseppe's funeral. In all probability he would be pained if he did attend and did not see herself there. Therefore, Guarda put on her most sombre apparel and drove to the church with Elise. They were the only living persons present save the priest and his acolytes, and the men from the undertaker's. With growing anxiety, Guarda witnessed the last solemn rites for the man whose timely exit had given her such a spasm of joy. When the ceremony was over she sent Elise in a hired carriage to follow the body to the grave, and herself drove to Ordway's apartments. She had the carriage stop before turning into his street, and told her man to wait for her there. Thence she proceeded on foot, and when she had rounded the corner she stopped short, her heart in her mouth.

Drawn up in front of an apartment house a few rods distant was a hearse, and behind it a number of carriages. Guarda never had been there, but she knew that that must be the house where Ordway lived. At this moment some men were bearing a coffin from the door to the hearse. There was a group of women and children on the sidewalk. Guarda hastily lowered her veil, and, trembling so that she walked with difficulty, drew near and joined the group. Presently she saw Ordway among the bearers, and while she choked with relief, apprehension hardly less tense than at first caused her to clutch at a railing with one hand and press the other to her lips. She did not know, and there was nobody to tell her, that next to Ordway stood the city

editor; that behind him was the night editor; that the managing editor himself was one of the bearers; and that the men who issued slowly from the house and took places in the waiting carriages comprised substantially the entire staff of Billy Jameson's paper.

She saw as in a dreadful dream, and not till the procession had left the street could she stir from the spot and return to her carriage.

At home, she waited in agony for the return of Elise, whom she dispatched forthwith upon errands of inquiry; and when the girl came back from these she brought information that merely confirmed Guarda's supposition. Much, then, was explained; but what was to follow? Guarda paced her parlor until she was physically tired. Then she sat at her desk and wrote. Her first attempt displeased her, and she destroyed it. What would be best calculated to draw him to her? Should she confess knowledge of the grievous facts and express herself accordingly? Or should she play upon that grand passion that she had seen him hold in such valiant restraint?

In the end she wrote the following:

"My true, tender hearted lover:—For the first time in my life, I have known what it is to be lonely. Every hour without you now is an eternity. It seems as if we had always loved each other, and yet it is so new! I hardly know which gives me the greater joy—the thought that in you I have a lover who is steadfastness itself, or the sweet memory of your lips and the protecting pressure of your arms. I think of the future with tranquil, perfect security, for my faith is in you. I look

back upon that heavenly hour when we opened our hearts, and marvel that a woman can know such infinite, such overwhelming joy. One day I said, 'It was only yesterday;' then, 'it was only the day before yesterday;' and now, so many eternities are comprised in the few hours that have passed! And yet I am still quivering with the joy of it and the anticipation of the morrow when you will surely come again. I know not how to tell you my love. Believing in myself, as I do so frankly, I cannot think that ever woman loved as I do; and all my love I lay at your feet, knowing that you are worthy a thousandfold more and deeper love, and that you will treasure this greatest gift that I can make to you through all the eternities of hours that are yet to come. Henceforth my heart will be your home, your resting place, your refuge from all that may weary or sadden you. And so, loyal lover mine, believe that all I have and am is yours.

Guarda."

Late in the afternoon Elise took this to Ordway's rooms. He was not at home, and, under instructions from her mistress, she waited at the door till she saw him wearily turning the corner. Then she tripped up the stairs and down again in time to meet him as he began to ascend.

"From ma'm'selle Guarda, m'sieur," she said.

He took the letter, and, to her consternation, opened and read it where he stood.

"Tell your mistress," said he, "that it was my intention to call upon her to-morrow at three. I shall hope to find her disengaged at that hour."

He went on up the stairs, leaving the girl so amazed that it was a full minute before she bethought herself and departed. Elise did not report the facts to Guarda. There was too much suggested tragedy in the air for

that. Elise was mystified and insanely curious to see how it would all come out.

"Dame!" she muttered. "What am I that I should try to influence it? He is very sad, but he cannot be indifferent—not to her. I dare not tell her anything to suggest such a monstrous thing. Let her find it out if she must, and if she cannot manage him. We shall see."

So Elise told Guarda that Ordway had wept when he read the letter, and that his voice choked when he gave the answering message; and her lively fancy even stimulated her to declare that he kissed the paper till one might well doubt whether a word of it could be read. Guarda believed her.

There was choir rehearsal that evening, and service the following forenoon. Between whiles, Ordway had ample time for the meditation that accorded with his habit. He came to certain important conclusions—foremost that, aside from the influence of all immediate events, there was fundamental incompatibility between Guarda's temperament and his own. Her overweening ambition, with its incident craving for publicity, was a menace to any who bound his life to hers. She, herself, had demonstrated this. How glad had been that cry of hers that love for him demanded no sacrifice. The ideal love of which he had dreamed would have joyed in opportunity for sacrifice. He would not question her love; he allowed that it was genuine of its kind; but he saw now that at basis it was selfish, and that her

life and every separate act were dominated still by that crushing sentiment with which she set out upon her career. Nothing should stand in its way. With himself ever at her side, she would find presently that his acute sensibilities were in her way to the extent, at least, that they interfered with and irritated her. She might be right; let it be so in argument. The two natures could not be assimilated.

There was conscious pride in Ordway's heart when he found that he could bring himself to this view of the matter. It was so much better than to be swayed by mad impulse. If he had not kept the habitual check upon himself he might have rushed from Billy's death scene to curse her and bring their relations to end with all the dramatic fury that hate could inspire. It was much better to be judicially deliberate—aye, to make allowances for her and tell her gently and with all composure that he had been mistaken in thinking he loved her; that he had loved an imaginary woman whose features she had assumed; that her voice and art had beguiled him into a passion that could not endure rude shocks, and that for her own sake it would be better to forget him speedily. Such was his programme. It was much better than any unrestrained outburst of passion, and it gave him consciousness of superiority to the ordinary run of men that was not without its influence.

He had fixed upon Sunday afternoon because then all would be over so far as Billy was concerned. Having established his programme, he saw no reason to modify

it even when he read Guarda's appeal to passion and pride. She reminded him of delirious kisses, and he loathed the memory; she staked her confident faith upon his steadfastness, and he perceived that her error lay in not realizing what it was to which he was steadfast—himself. Comprised in that apparently selfish word were his ideals, his sensibilities, his inheritance of character, and his long-established affections.

On this occasion, quite as usual, Ordway sent up his card and waited to be summoned. He was more than ever punctilious. In the elevator he repeated silently the phrases with which he had arranged to begin the unpleasant but necessary conversation. It should be long enough to cover the ground, but it should not be unduly drawn out to the pain of both of them.

She stood at the pianoforte when he opened the door. The light was strong upon her, as if a portrait painter had posed her there. A lovely picture she made for a first, brief glimpse—brief because she started forward with arms extended. Midway of the room, she halted abruptly, startled by the extraordinary change that had come upon her visitor. His grave face had grown suddenly livid; one hand was raised in repellent, commanding gesture.

"You killed him!" he exclaimed.

"Herbert!"

There was infinite shock in the tone, sudden despair and something akin to terror in her eyes.

"Yes, you!" he went on. "I make no apology for his

weaknesses and his mistakes, and I grant you no extenuation for them. You led him on. You told me so. I have lost the one true friend of my life, and you robbed me of him."

One fierce flash darted from her eyes while he spoke, and then she caught her breath. She was under her own command at the end.

"My unhappy friend," she said, softly, "you are suffering and sorrowing deeply. I have heard of it. I wanted to go to you, but I thought you would come here for comfort."

She stretched her arms again, for he seemed to be wavering. In truth, he himself was shocked at what he had said, and the hot burst of passion left him for the instant exhausted. Recovery was quick upon her gesture.

"Don't come near me," he said, in a low tone, and hastily. "Don't try me too far. I did not come here to say what I have said. God knows how far hate might take me."

"Hate, Herbert?"

"Hate! I thought it was philosophy. I thought I could be calm in your presence. I cannot. I meant to spare you as much as possible. I was making allowances for you. God in heaven! can you not understand that I am like other men, with——"

Guarda interrupted with a rippling laugh.

"A most conventional, ordinary man!" said she. "Go on, do! It is an amusing finale."

He was astounded, incredulous; but there she stood, laughing, superior, contemptuous.

"Pray do not spare me," she continued. "I must have seemed quite ridiculous, but I had to make my experiment. It is thus that an actress gains facility in emotions, you know, Mr. Ordway—thus that she can become great. I shall remember this scene. As for your unfortunate friend, do not think for a moment that I take you seriously. A woman who charged her conscience with the follies of her men friends would be in a sorry pass. Oh, dear, yes! Of course this had to come some time—that is what you intended to say with your philosophy and allowances, which I don't need in the least, thank you. As I cannot be accountable for the follies of the men who come my way, so I cannot always arrange my affairs to a precise programme. You see, I had rather thought that the break might be postponed till I felt the time ripe to let you know that I have been cognizant all along of your trickery."

Ordway was listening as if he were numb. He could not understand this change in her demeanor and apparent revolution in her mood. Her innuendo aroused him.

"Trickery!" he repeated. "What do you charge me with?"

"Why, the theft of my aria at Boxford. I have long perceived that you were the inspiring genius of that audacity. Your friend Billy was the instrument, and a clever one——"

"Do you mean to say that Billy stole your music?"

"Of course! How else would he have been able to substitute your piece? Don't tell me that you were not cognizant of the circumstances, for I shall not believe you. I have lost all interest in the matter. You may remember that I returned your precious piece to you."

"That a reduced score might be made."

"Oh, no! to be rid of it. I did think that possibly you might be inspired to the composition of something worth while; but," she shrugged her shoulders and turned languidly to a window; "it has been a passably interesting experiment," she added.

He stood stock still for a moment, and then left the room. It was not for him to see what prying Elise managed to observe from a slightly opened door—how Guarda, as soon as he had gone, clenched both hands above her head, trembled, and then sank face down upon a couch. It was not for him to suspect the tumult of disappointment so nearly akin to despair that raged within her as she saw one dear prize of life slip from her grasp.

To him, as he left the hotel, it seemed as if the ropes had broken and the curtain had fallen on his fifth act with a smash; and he wished that his head were under the heavy pole.

CODA.

I.

A strong man does not give himself time to be sorry.
—The Hermit.

We were at some pains to note the chronological details of that crisis in which Ordway was deeply concerned. Now comes a period in which time no longer counts. One day is like another. To-day is the repetition of yesterday, the model for to-morrow. All are filled to repletion with work.

Ordway was never without something to do. There were compositions to be completed, not because of external demand, but to satisfy the inner compulsion that, having conceived them, cannot rest until they are brought forth in perfect form. He set himself to finish a sonata movement begun in the early winter, and laid aside because matters of immediate consequence required attention. In this his work was analogous to that of the carpenter rather than that of the architect. His materials—that is, his themes—were before him; it was not a question of the creation of new materials, but of putting them together according to the demands of a prearranged form. Hardly had he begun upon this ex-

acting task—it was indeed on the very evening following his break with Guarda—when his pen halted. There was a knocking at the door of his inmost consciousness, a knocking that gathered strength and insistence as he refused to open; but this door of the musician's spirit is transparent, and through it he saw his unbidden visitor and knew that beauty stood there, fresh, attractive, smiling in the confidence of winsomeness.

"No!" said Ordway, silently, "this is no time for you. Your coming now is profanation to the grief that dwells here. Begone!"

But beauty smiled, knocked louder and more insistently, and, while he frowned in vain resistance, in she came, defiant of barriers and overstepping them. Humiliated and yet enthralled, the composer must needs take a clean sheet of paper and set his pen in motion upon it to be rid of her; and presently he was absorbed in the creation of music that up to that hour never had been. The door was wide open now, for he could not shut it, and in trooped a host of unbidden guests. He bowed his head in deep abasement, yet did their bidding; he hugged his grief to his aching heart in dreadful terror lest this that upheld the wreck of his egotism and pride should be displaced by these fair strangers, and they sat with him, smiling still and driving him to work, and never once seeking, not one of them, to displace grief or flout it.

The gas jets above him were sickly in the gray dawn, when at last, in sheer fatigue, he dropped his pen, and it

seemed as if the unbidden guests themselves closed the door in kindness to keep out any others.

Ordway was amazed and humiliated when he awoke and thought about it. Was it not some vivid delusion? Half dressed, he went into his work room and looked over the freshly written sheets on the table. He sat at the instrument and gave the symbols vibrant life. It was more than true. All this was beautiful, and well he knew that the undiscriminating would likely regard these melodies as songs of joy. What could it mean? Had he not suffered deeply? and did he not sorrow still? Aye, but he had come to a profound distrust of himself, based upon what he regarded as the incorrigible fickleness of his nature. For a time he had battled with what he believed to be undying love for Guarda; came a tempest, and, puff! out went the flame as completely as if it never had burned. Not a cinder was left to glow in the darkness of his soul; the ashes were cold as death itself.

Some days and nights followed in much the same way, the hot routine of composition broken only by duties little less absorbing—his teaching and choir work. Then came a tenor singer of renown. He brought verses, gay, jubilant songs of love. Would Mr. Ordway set them to music for him? Mr. Ordway's song cycle, that had been given by Madame Guarda with such brilliant success, had opened the eyes of a good many vocalists to his genius. The tenor would be very glad

to commission the composition of a group, if Mr. Ordway would undertake the work.

It was true, as the flattering visitor said, that Guarda's recitals had "made" Ordway's songs. Doubtless she never would sing them again, but the impetus had been given before the break came; other singers were taking them up, and the public was buying.

The composer looked over the verses and shrank from them. Their spirit was counter to everything in his present condition. It was abominable that songs of joy should be looked for from him at this period, and yet, even as he gazed moodily at one of the poems, the first line began to hum in his brain, his fancy leaped over the intervening lines to the last, and he perceived a thrilling climax—

"I'll do them," he said abruptly; "I'll send for you in a few days to try them over."

And not long afterward he forgot his shame in the fever of creation. In the very heat of his work, when his imagination not only glowed with melody but looked forward to the reward of appreciation, hope for which is inseparable from composition, he said, or thought it so intently that he seemed to say, "Billy will be mightily pleased at this."

His pen dropped, and he sat back in his chair, deeply shocked. How long had it been in his subconsciousness that he would tell Billy the glad news? and that meant, how long had he forgotten Billy and the grief that gave him some shred of confidence in his stability? It was

with painful difficulty that he brought himself to a realization that the thought of Billy at this juncture proceeded from habit, and that the manifestation of the habit was a sure testimony to his loyal affection for his friend ; and it was not until he had reasoned himself to a perception of this truth that he could go on and finish the songs.

If we were to follow him closely through the tortuous channels of his morbid reflections, running upon every snag of self-depreciation, sheering from the truth whenever it appeared to view, holding up his self-distrust to the slowly brightening light, we should turn this account of his beginnings into a metaphysical treatise, and that is foreign to the purpose. But to a satisfactory comprehension of his career it is necessary that there should be this brief indication of his thoughts' complexion. It would not be expected of Ordway that grief and disappointment would drive him to any form of dissipation ; that he plunged into absorbing work might, perhaps, have gone without saying ; but he suffered deeply, and in Stygian darkness, and wrought his way to the light through the silent conflicts within him.

It may not be amiss to suggest briefly some of the conclusions, instantly patent doubtless to many, to which he arrived only after long months of inward struggle. That love, an army of romantic novelists to the contrary notwithstanding, is a state of being that is born with the individual, and is as eternal as he is ; it is not created by the object upon which it fixes itself, but

exists irrespective of it, seeking ever that object that approximates most closely to its ideal. When such an object seems to appear, there is a mighty awakening of love, and it bestirs itself so amazingly that the victim—how proper is the term from this point of view!—is led easily to believe that the ideal itself has been discovered. Let the revelation of the error come in season, or out of season, and it is not love that dies; it is the deluding excitement that subsides with the destruction of the supposed ideal. Love endures, and when it is a state of a strong, pure nature, happy may that person be who rearouses it. For, and it was long, long afterward that this conclusion came to Ordway, love learns to discriminate between the lovable features of an object and that object's necessary human limitations; it cultivates the former and clings to them, and it tolerates or sturdily ignores the latter. Then, the delirium of early love having passed, that condition that for ages has been so aptly described as *love sickness*, your true lover becomes the steadfast, tender protector; in other words, a sane, admirable man—and the world ceases to have any interest in him.

One other conclusion, to which he came much more speedily, and that, this author has found, is by no means commonly accepted by those who do not know. With regard to his fecundity as a composer during this period when one might suppose the creative faculty would be under a dense cloud of depression. Music is a product of the mind, and its intellectual side is of incalculable

importance ; but it has its origin in the mysteries of the emotions which, at the last analysis, are one ; that is, any emotion may be analyzed as the individual manifestation of fundamental capacity for feeling. It only requires that that fundamental capacity should be deeply stirred to bring a manifestation of emotion, and if the person under consideration is one whose nature is attuned to music, he must of necessity give forth music as the result of the disturbance. As music is abstract, not you, or I, would be competent to state whether it came from the mind of a composer as utterance of joy or grief. It might appeal to you as grief, to me as joy. Moreover, the closest observers of musicians' lives have noted that the poet who wrote, "I am saddest when I sing," expressed a great truth ; and the songs of sadness are by no means all in the minor key.

Ordway's career was shaping well. Men looked upon him as successful, and congratulated him. Pupils applied to him in such numbers that he had little save the night time for composition. One day the mail brought a communication from his publisher, and he learned the meaning of the word royalty. He wrote to his mother about all these things, but, oh ! to tell Billy ! that eager desire never departed.

Spring was advancing when his material progress reached a climax in the shape of an offer from a fashionable church to become its organist. The salary was much greater than that he had been receiving, and there was certain other compensation of more importance at

the time, although he did not realize it. The congregation was one of those that disperses early to exercise its piety in Newport, Europe, and other places, leaving the home church with nothing to do for several months but keep cool and gather strength for another harvest of souls in the winter, there being, presumably, no souls in the city worth saving in summer. It had not been so with Ordway's first church. That was an organization of simple minded persons who waged incessant battle with sin, and he had had to keep the hymns going fifty-two Sundays in the year. To have a long vacation on pay was, then, not only a step in advance, but well nigh a necessity, for the persistence with which the composer occupied every hour of his waking time in hard work had more than begun to tell on him.

As a matter of course he went to East Wilton when the doors of the church were closed, for he had at that time no ambition to travel, and, from his point of view, insufficient means to justify an expensive holiday. In truth, too, he longed for the familiar quiet of the old home, and for days after he arrived he hardly stirred from the house. The prosaic but wholesome fact is that he slept most of the time. He went to bed early and arose late; he nodded uncomprehendingly over a book until it fell from his hands; and after the midday dinner he stretched himself shamelessly on the old fashioned lounge in the parlor, having neither desire nor energy to go out of doors. Ordway was getting well. He had been a sick man and did not know it.

On Sunday he went to church with his mother, and found a singular satisfaction in sitting in the quaint, old pew that had not known his presence since he was a boy ; for he had graduated early to the organ loft at the back and remained there till he went to the city in quest of fame and fortune. It was very restful, this hard backed pew, with its worn cushion, its plain footstool, and the rack with its two dog-eared hymn books. Restful and surcharged with reminiscences. How comical now seemed those tragedies that sometimes had been taken with him to meeting in the old days ! His breast heaved as he thought of the grief wasted at a time when he could hardly see the minister over the back of the pew in front, and then he pulled his moustache nervously to repress a smile, for he had caught sight of the clock over the pulpit. Ah ! how he had studied that clock ! His years were very tender when patient observation had taught him that the dominie was good for an average of forty minutes. The first part of the service was wholly endurable, for there was music in it, and a good deal of getting up and sitting down, variety that is mightily grateful to short legs that dangle over a pew edge. The sermon—well, with all respect to the place and the good dominie, be it said that the sermon was endurable, because it had an amen to it when the forty minutes were up. Ordway's unholy smile arose from the recollection of the Sunday remote in his history when the sermon began at twenty-five minutes after eleven. That was a little later than usual, the dominie having overstepped

his limits in the prayer, and one of the hymns having had five long stanzas. This was creepily portentous of a longer discourse than usual, but the boy counted along the dial and made sure that if the dominie only would hold himself down to his average the amen was due at five minutes after twelve. Firstly, secondly, and, eke, thirdly, went by in good order, none too long dwelt upon, and the minute hand was at nine. Half the allowance was up. The second half was always the longer, but it could be fought through stubbornly by taking account of every two minutes instead of every five. "Twenty minutes more, eighteen minutes more, sixteen minutes more," it was thus that the small boy kept track of the earnest party up in the pulpit. "Fifthly," said the minister, and the boy's heart all but ceased to beat. The minute hand was at ten, where it had been at least a long minute ago! On went the preacher, but the minute hand stayed obstinately where it was. Goodness me! the clock had stopped, and there never could be any amen! The boy tugged at his mother's skirt to attract her attention and apprise her of this alarming fact. She could not understand his perturbation, and she subdued him with severity that almost broke his heart, but he was subdued, and he quaked in silence till, somehow, to his inexpressible relief, the minister said amen, and after the hymn and the benediction the small boy trudged home in utter bewilderment as to how it had come about.

When the voluntary began, the reedy, wheezing tones of the ancient organ thrilled the city listener as no noble symphony could have done. It was like a sweet but forgotten chapter of his life being re-read to him. He wondered if he would know the anthem that was to follow. No, the music was new, but the uncultivated voices of the volunteer choir had all the harshness that used to try his patience so bitterly, and that familiar harshness now was positively pleasant. This music, with all its undeniable crudity, gave him a deeper sense of worship than he had known of late in the church where he officiated with high-priced solo singers and a paid chorus of trained voices. Yet he distinguished one voice, just as he had in times past, that was pure in quality and correct in intonation. That was Barbara, but it was not until there came a soprano solo, and her voice stood forth unaffected by the others, that he noted a difference. This seemed like a cultivated voice. It was the same as of old, but better, larger, and her phrasing would have been perfect but for a shortness of breath that surprised him. At that, it was good singing, and remarkable for its quality of appeal, that quality that commonly is given to or withheld from a voice and cannot be acquired.

It never occurred to Ordway that the shortness of breath that interfered with the phrasing, and a good proportion of the "appeal," were due to his presence. Barbara saw him from the organ loft. If there had been any way to substitute an anthem that had no soprano

solo she would have insisted on a change, but it was too late, and sing she had to, as best she could. To her it seemed as if her every tone was childishly small, and she wanted to sink through the floor when she realized that she had next to no control over her breath. What a humdrum world it would be if everything in it appeared to everybody in precisely the same light!

After service he met Barbara in the vestibule. She was only one of a number who shook his hand and welcomed him back to the village. The customary gathering and lingering of the congregation there suggested a reception to him, and there was unexpected pleasure in the fact that these plain people, in whom he had felt too little interest, as he thought, remembered him kindly. Jane was among them, quite stunning in a new summer hat and other apparel to match. As it was Sunday, she held her demeanor in decorous check, but there was a mighty sharp glance in her eyes as she greeted him that promised pungent remarks when she should not be under the restraints of the Sabbath and the meeting house. "Come and see us," was the invitation given heartily by one and all, save Barbara; but Ordway, thanking everybody with cordiality that grew upon him, made no promises except to her and Jane. He told them that he had come home tired out, but that he would call as soon as he felt that he could keep his eyes open and take his share in a conversation. And Jane's eyes snapped, "You'd better!"

That he meant all he said may be taken for granted.

Nevertheless, nearly the whole week passed before he roused himself from the lethargy that was upon him, and, quite ashamed of his neglect, strolled across the fields to Barbara's. He found her deep in housework that she promptly laid aside without a word of apology for her appearance—she had on a skirt that had forgotten it ever had any best days—and there was brave light in her eyes when she said she was glad to see him. There was insinuating comfort in the familiar aspect of this room, as if his harassed spirit had stepped out into a warm summer afternoon when Nature lies idle for a bit for the very love of peace. Ordway rested in it without any of his tormenting analysis. It was good, and he allowed himself the luxury of enjoying what was at hand. They talked about various things. Barbara naturally made allusion to that great event, her visit to New York, and that led to mention of Billy. The tragic circumstances of his end were unsuspected in East Wilton. There were those who whispered that he had taken too fast a pace, but no echo of that gossip was to be found in Barbara's talk. She knew how close the two young men had been, or thought she did, for nobody save themselves could have told the strength of the ties that bound them, and she spoke with quiet sympathy that Ordway appreciated deeply. Somewhere in the conversation, when it had drifted over other topics, Ordway remarked that she sang very well on Sunday. "I think your voice has improved," he said.

"I'm glad you can say that after such an exhibition,"

she responded. "I thought I was doing dreadfully. I saw you there, and I was awfully frightened."

"Pshaw! Barbara, don't say that. You must never be afraid of me. As a matter of plain fact, I never heard you sing so well. You need a little firmer breath control"—

"Yes, that is what I am trying to acquire. My teacher says that I am improving."

"Your teacher! Then you have been studying."

"I have been going to Boxford twice a week for eight months and taking of the best teacher there. That's Jane's work."

"Good for Jane!"

"She insisted on it, and I could not see that I ought to refuse. She thinks it's possible that I may be able some day to earn something with my voice. It was her idea that I ought to be able to fall back on something if anything should happen. The house might burn up, as she said, or an earthquake might destroy the orchard."

"Jane has sense. I presume you enjoy the work."

"Oh, very much. I am discouraged sometimes"—

"You needn't be. I tell you you have improved more than I would have supposed possible in so short a time."

Barbara's eyes told her gratitude for this kind assurance. Her tongue was not trained to the utterance of conventional acknowledgments, and she kept silence.

When Ordway arose to go he noticed a book on the table that surprised him. It was one of the most recent

publications on music, a semi-historical, semi-philosophic work.

"Hello!" said he, "are you dipping into theory, too?"

Barbara blushed, but he did not notice, for he was turning the pages of the book.

"That is Jane's," she answered. "She left it here. Now and then she comes in to have me read it to her."

"So! What's she up to?"

"Studying."

"Yes, but what the mischief induces her to take up a subject like this?"

Barbara answered his look with a smile. "Jane says," said she, "that there are a lot of things in the world that she never can know anything about, and that there are some that she can know all about if she applies herself to them; and she doesn't mean to die till she's got somewhere."

Both smiled, it was so like Jane. "She says she gets along better if she has a pacemaker," added Barbara. "So she brings the books here and we read them together when I have time. We've been through several works in that way. I find it very pleasant."

"Funny old Jane," said Ordway, as he laid the book down. "When she has learned all there is to know about music, I wonder what she'll tackle next?"

II.

Where the stream runneth smoothest, the water is deepest.
—John Lyly.

Ordway returned to his mother's house just in time for supper, having taken a long ramble through fields and woods after leaving Barbara. Shortly before he came to the end of his walk he realized that he was tranquil. He had not thought of it before. That evening he went voluntarily to the pianoforte. Till then he had not touched the instrument except to please his mother when she asked him to play for her. And he did not go to bed till a perilously late hour, quite ten o'clock, unless the old timepiece in the sitting room took a freak of going at double speed that evening. During the last hour, when he sat alone, he—one is almost tempted to say, confound him!—he began to ask himself questions. Why was he so tranquil? Why had he gone so naturally to the pianoforte? and why a lot more.

It might be said that Ordway had come to himself, that he was well again; but there had to be a long period of convalescence, for self-distrust is an ailment that is not readily cured. The first result of his intro-

spection was an experiment. He waited till Sunday afternoon to try it, for then Barbara would not be hampered by household duties. His way lay, as usual, across the fields. There was a deep ravine to be crossed and its steep further side to be climbed before he came in sight of her house, which lay but a few rods beyond the top. As his head came above the ridge and he saw the chimney, and the roof, and the upper story, he heard music. He knew her instrument and her voice from the first sound, but the tones were faint, and their melodic connection was not clear until he had come to the stone wall that bounded Mrs. Kendall's little property. There he halted abruptly and stepped behind a bush that screened him from possible view from the house. It was one of his own songs that Barbara was singing; one from the cycle that Guarda had "made."

He did not listen critically; it did not even occur to him to contrast her simple, tentative feeling after the expression with Guarda's conscious method of infusing mighty passion into what she sang; but he listened intently, and uneasiness sat on his brow while his thoughts wandered. There was nothing wonderful in that two women should sing this published song; nothing out of the common, quite the contrary, in fact, that one of them, his friend for years, should chance to be singing it in his hearing; but this perfectly natural way of looking at the episode did not relieve him. He thought of the origin of the song. Guarda had not inspired it. Words and music had been on paper years before the

Boxford Festival. It had been selected with judicious care by Guarda to be the first in the cycle that they contrived out of his independent manuscripts, but as to its origin, Barbara had inspired it. Probably she had never suspected the fact, but thus it was, and well he remembered how he had taken the song to her for a hearing before it was half a day old. She had liked it then; he remembered with cutting distinctness how she had clapped her hands, and how her eyes shone with admiration when they had been over it together two or three times. And now she was singing it, and that commonplace fact made such a deep impression on him that he lingered behind the bush for not less than half an hour after he ceased to hear her voice.

To such an extent did the singing influence the current of his thoughts that, if he had been anybody but Ordway, he would have postponed his experiment and gone home; but he had made his programme, and when he was perfectly certain that she would not suspect that he had been near, he went on. The experiment did not begin at the moment of his arrival; circumstances were unfavorable, and his own prearrangement forbade haste. Mrs. Kendall was on the point of setting forth upon an errand of charity, and she delayed her departure for some minutes of general conversation. During this Ordway drifted without apparent design to the piano-forte, where, with immense assumption of indifference, he went to fumbling the music that lay upon it. If he had stumbled upon his song there he could have had

excuse to mention it, but the piece was not in evidence. He was all but irritated, for he burned to speak of it, and at last he did so.

"Barbara," he said, "I heard you singing one of my songs a little while ago."

"Why! where were you?" she asked, and colored.

"At the top of the ravine. It isn't possible you were singing it from memory."

"I was doing so, but not from memory of the song as you brought it here years ago. I shouldn't be equal to that. I have the music," and she brought it from a cabinet. "Jane bought it," she added.

"Jane! What"—and he began to smile.

"Yes," said Barbara, smiling also, "Jane said she wanted to realize that you'd done something that couldn't provoke her, so she bought the song and made me learn it to sing it to her. I know you never take offence at Jane's remarks."

"Of course not. What a Jane she is! Were you singing it to her this afternoon?"

Barbara was the least bit embarrassed. "No," she answered. "I like the piece very much. I always liked it. Jane had been here, and I suppose she reminded me of it."

He laid the music on the instrument. "I tried to call on Jane a day or two ago," he said, "but she was not at home."

"She spoke of it to-day, and said that she'd consider it a call, although you didn't leave your card, and would

return it within the time decreed by East Wilton etiquette."

Barbara did not say, for she did not know it, that Jane's first query that afternoon had been concerning Ordway. It was addressed privately to Mrs. Kendall, who met her in the front yard. "Has that city fellow called yet?" she demanded.

Mrs. Kendall, knowing to whom reference was made, replied in the affirmative. Thereupon Jane pressed her lips together and her eyes snapped. "He's been a long time getting started," said she; "if he doesn't show some sign of sense pretty soon, I shall stir him up."

"Don't do anything rash, Jane," suggested Mrs. Kendall, apprehensively; "you have the kindest intentions, but in matters of this kind you can't drive a man."

"Huh!" said Jane. "I know the proverb. 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.' Well, I'll lead him, and if he don't drink, I'll drown him. You see!"

Evidently Jane was up to something. With plenty of idle time, is it any wonder that she nourished deep designs upon the peace of Ordway? There is a certain individual, you know, who keeps an inexhaustible stock of mischief for the occupation of persons in Jane's circumstances.

"Barbara," said Ordway, "let's go out to the orchard."

This was his experiment. For as far back as he could remember it seemed to him that his happiest, most con-

tented hours had been spent with her under the apple trees. The meeting house, her home, his own home, the village generally had been flooding him with reminiscences, and each detail had contributed its share to restoring an atmosphere that had been forgotten. There was at least tranquility in this atmosphere. It might be that it held something deeper still for him. He would observe what influence there might be in a stroll around the orchard.

If he had been studying her instead of, or as well as, himself, he could not have failed to observe that she received the suggestion reluctantly. There was a moment of unmistakable hesitation on her part, but she went with him. He, seeking for impressions, was silent. She, embarrassed, must needs set talk to going, and she took not only the topic that lay closest at hand, but, perhaps, in her mind, it was one that was most certain to stimulate her courage by the very necessity of facing it bravely.

"I should like to hear Guarda sing that song," she said. "I suppose you have heard her. The title page says, 'Sung by Guarda,' and I have often thought how beautifully she must do it."

"Guarda is a great singer," said Ordway.

There was a moment of silence. Perhaps she had anticipated that mention of Guarda would incite him to enthusiastic if not fervent comment, and his tone seemed as cold as it was evidently restrained. It was the latter quality that gave her courage to proceed along

the same line. "Herbert," she said, "do you remember what I said as the train was leaving New York?"

"I couldn't possibly forget it," he told her, averting his eyes.

"I have been afraid that I presumed too much," she went on, steadily, "but if we are to be friends I do feel that I should be able to speak of things that are of the greatest importance to you. I wish you could know that I have thought about you both so many times. It has seemed so ideal that two persons of such great gifts in the same art——"

"Barbara!" he cried, sharply, unable to repress himself longer. "God knows I want you to be my friend and to speak to me as a friend may, but that one subject must be ignored."

"I am sorry," she faltered, and her distress wavered in the eyes into which now he looked unreservedly.

"Listen," said he, gently. "We won't have any possibility of misunderstanding. It is months since I have seen Guarda. We parted one day in a manner of my own seeking. It is impossible that we should ever meet again, and, Barbara, I hope devoutly that we never may."

All this was astonishing and dark to her; it was tragic, too; for though he spoke with Spartan steadiness, the note of suffering in his voice was as clear as a bell. Tears of purest sympathy came welling to her eyes, and there was an impulsive movement of her hands that he did not observe, for, instead of clasping his in the old,

frank way, they were hastily folded, and one presently brushed away the tears. "I am so sorry, Herbert," she whispered, for her throat rebelled at any louder utterance.

"You needn't be," he responded, shortly, and yet he set his teeth. "I never was so sure of anything as that that was for the best. Let's go on."

And on they went, once around the orchard and back to the house, he forcing the conversation to matters of no real interest to either of them, and as soon as he could well do so, he went home. If the experiment had been designed as a quest for greater tranquillity, it proved a dismal failure. The wreckage of past storms had been disturbed. Loosened from the sands that time had thinly covered over them, they beat against the walls of his heart with memories of their former violence. And yet, out of it all, and above the clamor, there was one sweet note of sympathy that he could not fail to hear, and that had its merciful influence in quelling this aftermath of tempest.

III.

A man may well bring a horse to the water,
But he cannot make him drink without he will.
—John Heywood.

“Is that ridiculous son of yours at home?”

Jane had come to make her threatened call, and it was thus that she announced herself to Mrs. Ordway. The ridiculous son heard from the sitting room, and prepared to extract what amusement he could out of bantering Jane concerning her extraordinary devotion to musical art. He never had been able to take her seriously, which was the way with all in East Wilton save the Kendalls.

“Have you come for a lesson in counterpoint?” he asked, when she came in with his mother.

“No, siree!” she responded, energetically; “I’ll give lessons rather than take them,” but the strenuous effort she made to appear scornfully composed showed that his shot had told. While his mother was present they exchanged thrust and parry with considerable gusto, but when Mrs. Ordway excused herself to attend to the baking, that had come to a critical stage, Jane’s manner changed. “You haven’t been well,” she said.

“I deny that,” he replied. “Lazy, that’s all.”

"No," and she shook her head. "I understand. The death of Billy Jameson must have been a terrible blow to you. I never saw such friends as you two boys were. I have been deeply sorry for you, Herbert, and wanted to say something about it, for I don't think most people round here realize how close he was to you."

The customary acidity in Jane's voice, which, by the way, I more than half believe was affected, was conspicuous by its absence. If you had been in an adjoining room, or if you hadn't known her, you would have said that her tone was gentleness itself.

"Why! thank you, Jane," stammered Ordway, completely taken aback.

"You needn't say anything," she interrupted. "I know how hard it is to speak, and sometimes I think sympathy might as well be left unsaid. Words don't do it justice, you know. We go on year after year repeating the same dreary commonplaces to persons who are in affliction, until I imagine we say them for our own sakes and not for theirs. But I've got to say something about Billy. I thought a great deal of him. There are a few small, narrow minded persons round here who take delight in saying mean things about him. They say he was dissipated. I wish you could hear me stand up for him. If they were as generous and noble as Billy Jameson was they could say their prayers with better grace. I tell 'em so."

She had returned to her energetic, aggressive way of speaking before she was done. It was as if she felt

shame that she had departed from it for one tender instant. Ordway got up and shook her hand.

"Jane," said he, "I could fall in love with you for what you say and think about Billy—that is, if I was capable of love."

"Ha!" said she, as he dropped her hand and stood back to her at a window, "it's too bad about you."

All her sarcasm had returned, and it was all concentrated in her brief remark.

"Yes," he admitted, gravely, "it is."

She compressed her lips, stared at his back and fidgeted. He sat down again presently. "There's a work on the scientific basis of music," he began, but she cut in disdainfully:

"I didn't come here to talk music. I'm in a peck of trouble."

"So? What's the matter?"

"It's about my money."

"I hope investments haven't gone wrong."

"Investments! la, no. It's distributed in savings banks, and every one of them is in an exasperatingly prosperous condition. I can't spend my interest."

"Then it's a question of investing the surplus, is it? I'm no authority on finance——"

"I didn't say you were. I don't want to invest my surplus. It would be absurd to think of it. An old maid going into financial business, pooh! But something's got to be done. Here in East Wilton I can get everything I want and more, too, on half my interest."

To live up to my income I should have to go somewhere else where life is conducted on a grander scale. Then I shouldn't have enough. I don't want to leave East Wilton. I'm satisfied here."

"Painful predicament," said Ordway. "You're growing richer all the time, and can't help it."

"I mean to help it if circumstances come around in a certain way." She stopped, pressed her lips and stared thoughtfully at Ordway. He was smiling his amusement. Twice, yea, three times, did Jane catch her breath and open her lips, and three times did something advise her emphatically to hold her peace and be patient. So she said nothing. Wise, funny old Jane!

"Well," said he, quizzically, "you'll have to embark in something of a philanthropic nature."

"For instance?" she demanded.

"What would you say to an old maids' home?"

"The very thing!" she cried. "I've been planning just such an institution. I mean to make Barbara Kendall the manager of it."

"She'd make a good one."

Jane stared hard at him. How serious was he? She never quite knew how to distinguish between Ordway's rather ponderous humor and his natural gravity. At present she was in so deep doubt as to what she ought to say that her puzzlement roused her to exasperation. So, what she did say was, "Herbert Ordway, I think you're a natural born idiot."

"Cling to that, Jane," he responded, without a smile; "it's a great discovery."

"Do you mean that you think it's true?"

"Yes, seriously."

"Then there's hope for you!" and she flounced out without another word.

At the dinner table an hour or so afterward, Ordway began suddenly to chuckle with vast amusement. His mother was mystified. "What are you laughing at?" she asked.

"The point of a joke has just reached me," he answered, "that was due an hour ago. With my usual density I've only just begun to see it," and he shook with mirth.

"Do tell me, Herbert. I'd like to laugh, too."

It had dawned upon him that Jane was trying to spur him to make love to Barbara! That had been the secret of her errand, and even she was not bold enough to approach the subject directly. She had talked absurdities about money to fill in the time, and at last had retreated as if convinced that she had not finesse enough for her delicate undertaking. What a comical, meddlesome, but well meaning Jane! His face was suffused with color as he chuckled and wiped his eyes.

"Come, Herbert!" cried Mrs. Ordway, laughing from the infection, "what is it? I want to know the joke."

"Mother," he answered, and through the tears of his laughter his eyes were dreamy, "I shouldn't wonder if I would tell you some time. Honestly, I almost hope I

shall," and that was all the satisfaction she had from him.

They have not observed Ordway closely who imagine that on the heels of this confession came his declaration to Barbara. Self-distrust was waging still a stubborn battle for control of his actions, but the conclusions indicated heretofore were beginning to arrive. With them came perhaps the most significant symptom of his complete convalescence, an alarming doubt as to Barbara herself. Was it possible that she could love him after these years of neglect and heart wandering? That she was sincerely and affectionately his friend admitted of no question, but love was another matter; that she would give her heart and possibilities of happiness into his keeping—really, it was most alarming to think that she would be quite sensible if she declined! It became such a distressing possibility that at last it admitted of no longer doubt, and he set off across the fields to find out about it.

Barbara met him at the door, a world of trouble in her eyes.

"We're awfully busy," she said, embarrassed to the degree of tremulousness.

"Bother!" said he, "can't you come for a walk?"

Jane's voice came from somewhere within. "Go away, little boy," it said; "we don't want anything to-day."

"Tell Jane to mind her own affairs," he suggested in a low tone. "Make her do your work for you."

"Oh! I cannot, really," began Barbara, and you might

have thought she was agitated. Jane came striding to her support. The old maid put her hands on the young maid's shoulders and wheeled her about. "Run, now," she said, "before it burns," and Barbara ran. There wasn't anything burning except her own tender heart, and the tears were flowing in vain attempt to quench the flames, but Ordway didn't know. He stood frowning in the most savage way at Jane, who placed her arms akimbo and blocked the doorway with acidulous serenity. "Nice day," said she.

"When is all this fury of work going to be finished?" he asked with no pains to disguise the offence he had taken at her manner.

"Oh, to-morrow," she answered cheerfully. "Come down to-morrow afternoon. It'll be quiet then and I'll be out of the way. A day more or less can be nothing to you. It's a good deal to us."

He made no more talk about it, but went home, displeased, and not a little anxious. His programme had been upset, and that is a calamity to a steady-going man. On the next day he could hardly wait till afternoon, for his anxiety had grown with his reflections upon Barbara's unusual manner. He had known her to be busy in times past, too busy to talk with him; but on such occasions she had had him in, and he had played the pianoforte, or read until she was free. Yesterday she had not even suggested that he might wait. So he was in what Jane doubtless would have called a proper frame of mind when mid afternoon came and he was

sure from his knowledge of the Kendalls' routine that Barbara would be comparatively idle. Down he went, determined that this time no Jane should stand long in his way. There was no sound of music or work from the house as he climbed the steep side of the ravine. It was very quiet, but he did not realize how quiet until he had knocked twice at the side door and nobody had answered. Then he observed that the shades were drawn down at the windows. What could be the meaning of it?

As he stood there and asked this question of the locked door a weight fell upon his heart, and it bore down so hard and deep that self-distrust, so far as it applied to the permanency of his affections, was buried beneath it forever. And while he stood there in a maze of painful wondering, a certain wily old maid sat serenely within the grape arbor, not a dozen feet away, compressing her lips into a contented smile. She had a book in her hand that had served to while away the time since noon, and it wasn't a treatise on the theory or history of music, either, but one of the most sentimental love stories known to literature. Such a Jane! "I've had one disastrous love affair, and one highly successful one," she said, but that was at a somewhat later date, and we are leaping a bit too fast in hinting at the second in her catalogue.

Ordway did not return across the fields. He went out to the road and marched up to Jane's house. Of course she was not at home, but he saw her, book in

hand, idling tranquilly along when he went out again at the gate. He went down to meet her.

"Where's Barbara?" said he.

Jane raised her brows in a tremendous affectation of surprise. "Isn't she at home?" she asked.

"You know she isn't, Jane. You know where she has gone. Tell me."

"What do you want to know for?"

"I'll tell Barbara that."

She looked at him with anxiety that was wholly unaffected. "I wonder if I ought?" she mused. "Barbara would take my head off——"

"I'll see that you get it back again. Come, Jane! I've got to know."

She told him, naming a modest summer resort not fifty miles distant. He did not pause to inquire why she had gone, but hurried home and packed for a journey. There was no train from East Wilton before the following morning, but there was one from a neighboring town that evening. He had himself driven across country and caught it. The evening was yet young when he arrived at Barbara's hiding place.

He saw her seated at the end of a veranda, as remote as possible from other guests of the house. Even her mother was not with her. Presently he stood before her, and she arose, stifling a startled cry.

"Barbara," said he, "I've come for the walk we didn't take yesterday."



"Do you think you can love me?"

See page 377.

"I was afraid—I thought you would come," she stammered.

"Afraid?" he echoed; "you might have known you could not escape me."

They walked slowly away from the chattering veranda, and when they heard only their own voices above the crackling chorus of crickets all around them, he told her of the battle that had been waging in his heart. He did not say what caused the strife, or go into material details, but he told her how he had distrusted his stability, and had come at last not merely to believe in, but to know himself, and that his love for her was one of the fixtures of his life. "And I want to know about you, Barbara," he concluded. "Do you think you can love me?"

"Herbert," she answered, "I have always loved you."

To him the serene happiness of that moment, wholly free from delirious ecstasy, was the most wonderful experience he had ever known. "Why, then," he asked, "should you have been afraid I would follow you?"

Then, faltering, laughing a little at times, she told him how her mind had been quite made up that she was to be his friend, and friend only, and how the revelation that he and Guarda were not to be married gave her a dreadful shock, largely and firstly from sympathy for him, but partly, as she thought it over, on her own account; for he had found her studying music; she knew that she simply could not conceal her affection from

him, and she had a dreadful fear that he would suspect her of playing for him by assuming an interest in his art. And, thinking, and taxing her conscience, a profound suspicion of dear old Jane had arisen in her mind. Jane had studiously stimulated her musical work; Jane had persistently kept her thoughts upon Ordway, buying his songs and forever alluding to him. She felt that Jane had put her in a most embarrassing position, and she taxed Jane with her accusation.

"Well, dear," said Jane, "if you see it in that light, why not keep away from him?"

"But I can't keep him from calling here," said Barbara.

"Then run away," and Jane had suggested that she go with her mother to this place and remain till the end of Ordway's vacation.

"And she promised, oh! so faithfully," concluded Barbara, "that she wouldn't give you the least hint as to where we were."

"I see," said Ordway, solemnly. "Jane has put up a job on us."

"Yes," ruefully, but not resentfully.

Ordway caught her in his arms and laughed, while he kissed her, as he had not laughed since before the Boxford Festival. "I think we shall have to forgive her," he said. "I wonder if it really enters her head that she spurred me on? Why, I went to your house yesterday to have just this talk! I hoped it might be in

the orchard where we had a talk some years ago that wasn't so satisfactory."

"I felt that it was what you came for," she responded, "and I wanted so dreadfully to listen, and was afraid to, and we were half packed, and Jane was there——"

"And," said Ordway, "she had to work out her scheme or not be content. I can understand Jane in that."

"But, Herbert, do you forgive me for my cruelty of that other time? I didn't mean to be cruel; I was trying to be wise for both of us."

"And you were wise, Barbara."

"But I asked if you would give up your music for me."

"And I hadn't the courage to say no."

"Was that it?"

"Wholly. I was weak, sensitive, egotistic——"

She put her hand over his lips. "You shall not say such things of yourself," she said. "Shall I tell you that I wanted you to say no?"

"Indeed! and what would have been your response to that?"

"I should have given myself to you without reserve."

"Well!" said Ordway, with a mighty gasp, "well! I wish I had had the courage of my convictions then as I have now."

IV.

Man's best possession is a sympathetic wife.
—Euripides.

Under this heading it seems superfluous to add a word, the implication being all that could be desired, but for form's sake, and two or three historical details, it will be well to make a chapter of it. Jane insisted that she did it. Nothing, assurance or mockery, would persuade her that she had not managed Barbara's courtship. "What did I take her to New York for?" she cried.

"I had an idea you wanted to see the town," suggested Ordway, and that shot was the nearest to overcoming her; but she waved it aside, and she maintains to this day that if she hadn't contrived matters her second love affair never would have terminated successfully.

"You see, my dears," she says to her confidants, "Herbert is such a—such an Ordway, you know, that if I hadn't made him think that Barbara was in danger of being lost to him, he never would have got up fire enough to pop the question."

Her wedding gift to Barbara, with a letter that accompanied it, explained some things.

"My dear," she wrote, "as I have said repeatedly, it is absurd that a useless old maid should have twice as much money as she needs. I could give to the church, and it would be spent in paint, whereas I love the smoke-marked window sills, the worn edges of the pews, and the weather beaten clapboards. I could give to a mission, and it would eventually come to heathen who don't appreciate the necessity and glory of Easter bonnets. I prefer to establish an old lady's home. I told that man of yours about it once, but he is such a donkey that he wouldn't understand. I used the word lady in the singular, he in the plural, even when I told him I meant to make you the manager. This money, that I can't use, my dear girl, is for the home of the peaceful, contented old lady that I hope you will become long after I have gone to rest. I want you to do with it exactly what you wish, and if it will make you happy to spend every cent of it on that man, do so. He may tell you a thousand times a day that it is his one desire to make you happy. Believe him, dear child, and make him see that you believe, but don't forget that there is one other who ventures to assert that his desire for your happiness is no greater than hers. That one is your own, crusty, meddlesome

"JANE."

The envelope enclosed ten one-thousand dollar bills. Wasn't that like Jane? but, of course, you can tell only

from what little has been set down about her here. We, who have the high privilege of friendship with Jane, simply nodded and smiled when we heard of her letter and its enclosure, and were not in the least surprised. A slight exception should be made of Ordway. He was astonished, but not to such an extent that he could not do the right thing. He went to Jane to thank her in behalf of his wife.

"Jane," said he, "the donkey is deeply appreciative, but he doesn't know exactly how to express himself."

"There's just one way," said she, seriously.

"What is it?" and he expected a kindly lecture on his duty to Barbara.

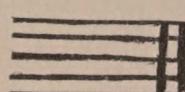
"Bray," said Jane.

.

You may never have heard Guarda, and it is hardly likely that you will have that privilege; but she still sings. It is not under the old name. For some reason best known to her, she adopted another stage name after that American season, and for a time it was supposed that she had retired on her comfortable fortune. But, if you care to know, she went to a country across the water, made a great success, and stays there, appearing with almost clock-like regularity in festivals and grand concerts, and in opera during the season. Time and again she has been besought by impresarios to come to America, but she declines on the hardly credible ground that she cannot endure the deathly qualms of travel at sea. It is a small detail, but it may interest

you to know that one who has visited her reports that a certain French maid is no longer with her. It is understood that the maid received her walking papers in New York shortly after making a false report about a letter she had carried for her mistress.

We may now say literally fare well to Herbert Ordway. This has been but a view of his beginnings, the whole, with all its divisions and subdivisions, being no more than the prelude to his real life. It is unthinkable that such a nature would not profit in greater strength from such experiences as were his, and that is the main thing. Whether he proves to be a genius is of no vital consequence, for the world has greater need of pure lives than it has of masterpieces. So, then, we may leave his future to himself and his devoted wife with every confidence that whether or not he justifies his friends' hopes for his distinction as a composer, it will be normal, properly rounded, and happy—happy in pure love and unremitting labor in the field of that art that has to do more than any other with lofty ideality.



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